

NATIONAL REVIEW

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utopianism
of Jean-Jacques
Rousseau—then
and now

John D. Hagen, Jr.

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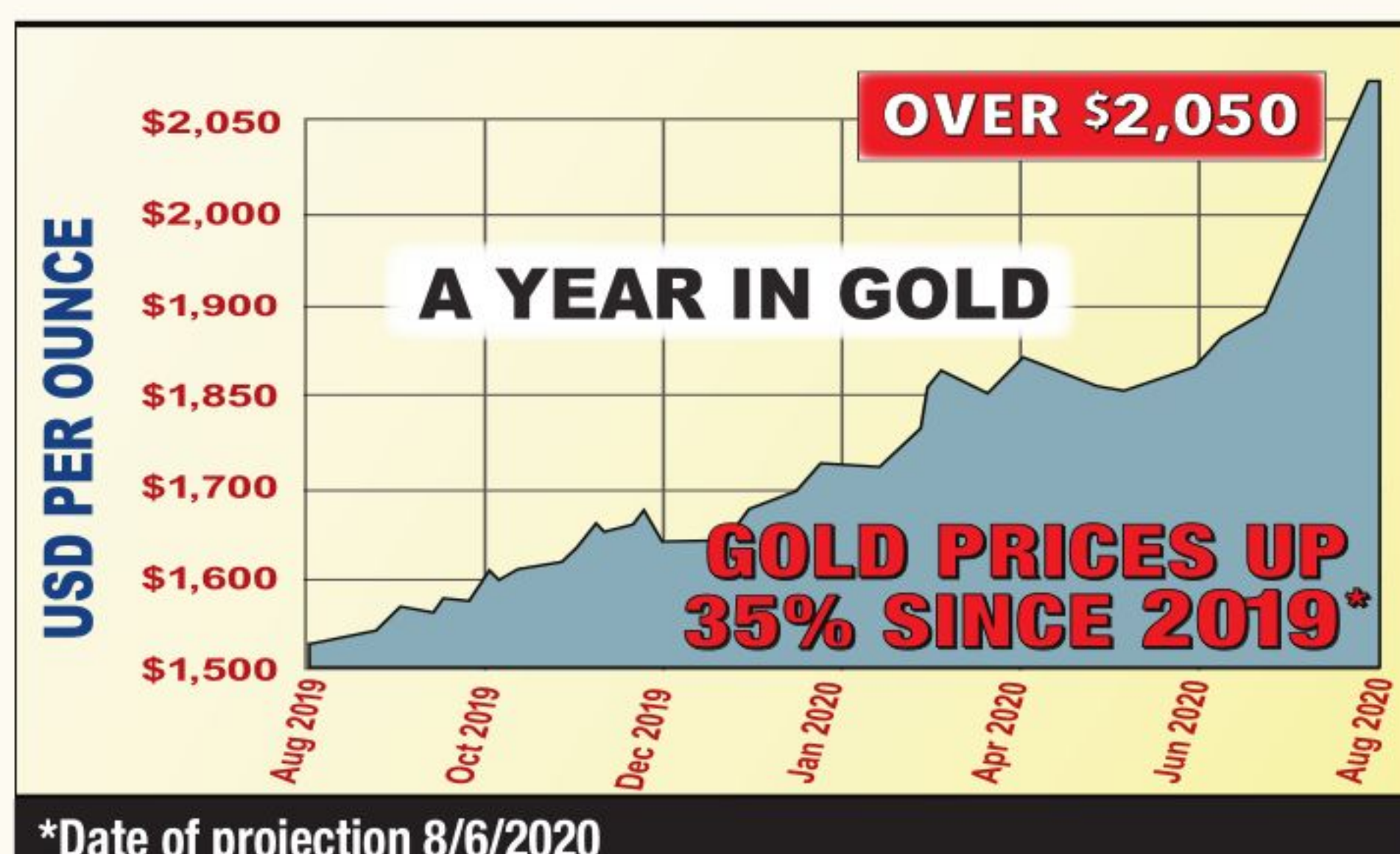
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The Gospel of Jean-Jacques

Rousseau is the leading spirit of the cultural Left, in our time as in his. He voiced the great paradox of the Left—libertarian selfism in morals combined with coercive, collectivist statism in political arrangements. *John D. Hagen, Jr.*

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Knight Train

I enjoyed Armond White's piece "Motown" in your wonderful July 27 issue. I am a white Baby Boomer and an unapologetic, devoted fan of the gorgeous pop music of the Carpenters, but I've always enjoyed Motown as well. I particularly adore "Midnight Train to Georgia," by Gladys Knight and the Pips. Though Mr. White didn't mention the song in his article, it exemplifies the spirit of Motown (despite having been released by Buddah Records) that his article conveyed. Written by a former Ole Miss quarterback (pre-integration); memorably performed by a classic Motown group ("woo, woo"); telling the story of a California girl who has fallen in love with a Georgia man and decided to accompany him back to his home after he's given up on his dream "that someday he'd be a star." Has there ever been a more thoroughly American song?

Jay Lewis
Monroe, La.

First in Flight

Much though I hate to contradict Mr. Mamet, I must dispute a statement he made in his article "The Nazis Got Your Mom" (August 10). American aviation most emphatically did not begin in Los Angeles, Calif. It began 2,000 miles to the east, in Dayton, Ohio, where the Wright brothers began investigating the problem of powered, controlled, heavier-than-air flight as early as 1899, culminating in the first flight in 1903. True, that flight took place in North Carolina, but only because it has a windy coast. After the first few flights, they packed everything on a train and headed home to Dayton to begin the serious work of learning to fly. Working out of Huffman's cow pasture with an improved version of their "flying machine" (the Wright Flyer III), they pioneered a number of aviation firsts (the first aerial turn, the first circle, the first figure eight, the first passenger) and in the process proved that their invention was more than just a rich man's toy. By 1908, the airplane had become a commercial venture, and the rest, as they say, is history. Next time you are in Dayton, visit the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park, where you can see the fourth Wright Brothers' cycle shop, the original Wright Flyer III (the first practical airplane), and Huffman Flying Field, where not just American but world aviation history began.

Tim Snyder
Via email

DAVID MAMET RESPONDS: Dear Mr. Snyder, you're right, I'm wrong. Thank you for your correction. Allow me to amend my sentence: "The birthplace of American commercial aviation was that area once known as 'California.'"

Corrections

"The Celestial Afterlife of Karl Marx" (Kevin D. Williamson, August 24) quoted a letter from Engels and characterized it as chastising Marx for his anti-Semitism. The letter is indeed published as part of the Marx-Engels correspondence, but it is not a letter to Marx. The intended addressee is unknown.

"*Obergefell* at Five" (John Hirschauer, August 24) stated that Jack Baker and Michael McConnell's lawsuit to have their union recognized as marriage received from the Supreme Court the one-sentence response "Questions raised by this appeal are moot." In fact, it was the Hennepin County, Minn., district court that gave this reply.

Letters may be submitted by email to letters@nationalreview.com.

Trump's **BLITZ**

Buckle up — 2020 will be the political ride of your life!

Ever since he first announced his presidential quest — after coming down the escalator of New York's Trump Tower — the media, the establishment, and his critics in both parties belittled, demeaned, mocked, and even laughed at Donald Trump.

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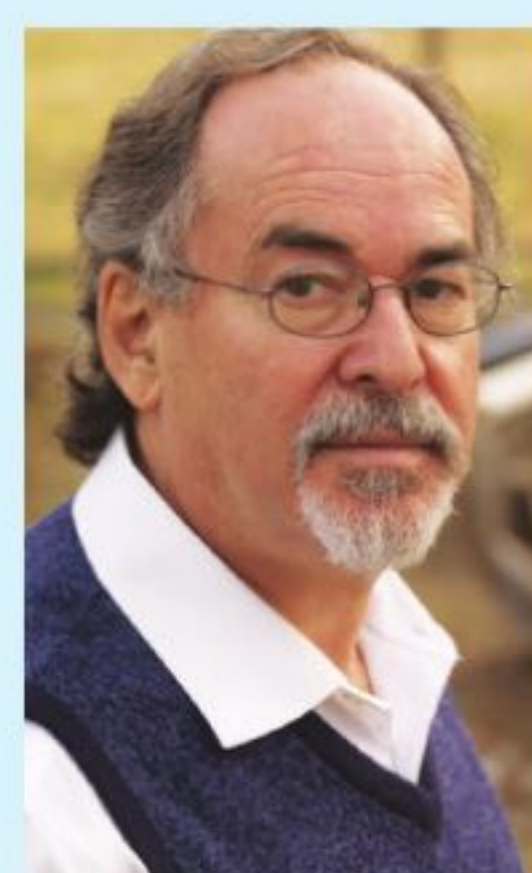
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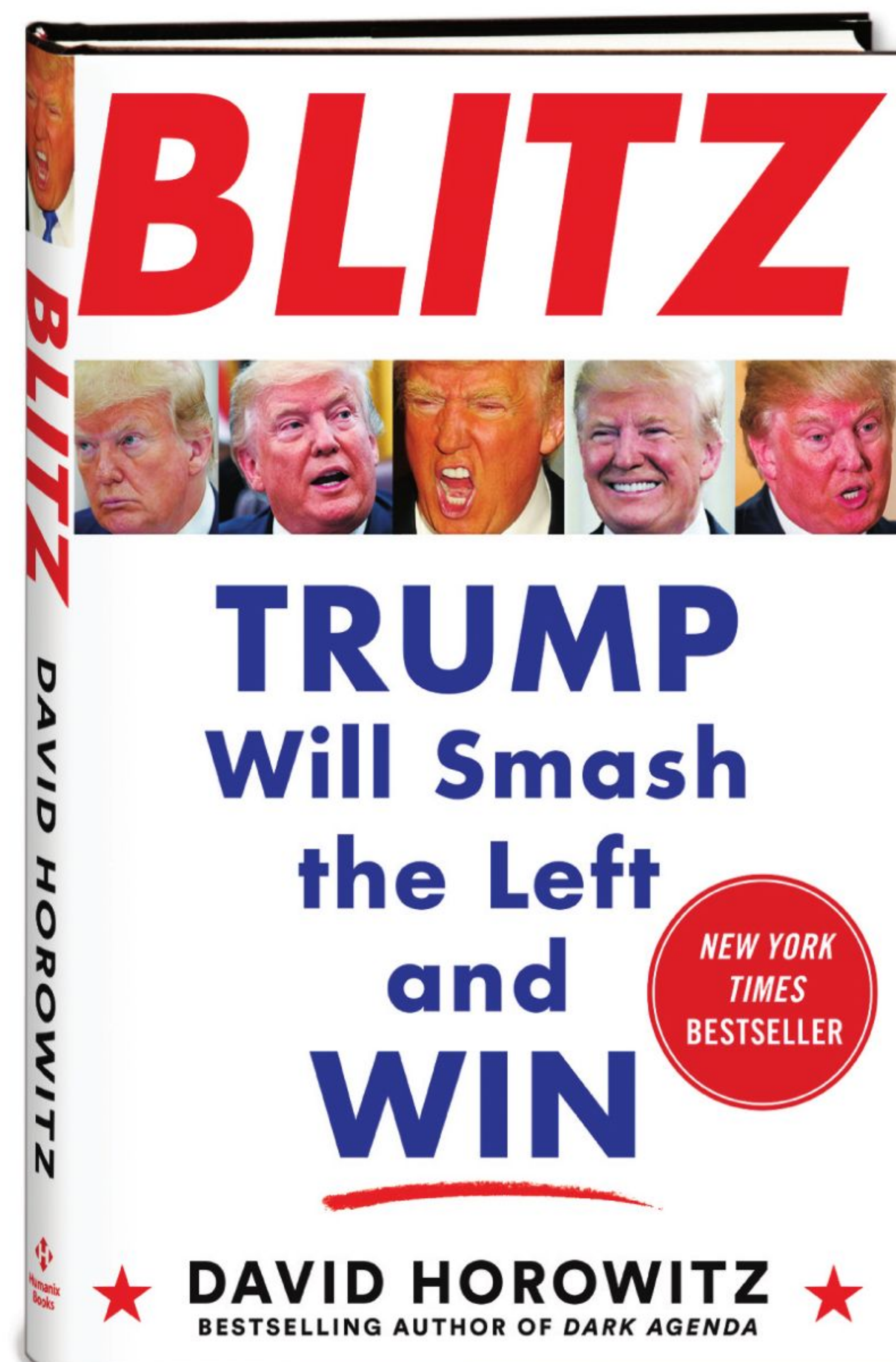
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His *New York Times* bestseller *Big Agenda: President Trump's Plan to Save America* was written before Trump was elected — so certain was Horowitz of Trump's victory.

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The Week

■ Andrew Cuomo has done the impossible: make us miss Mario Cuomo.

■ The great Postal Service coup of 2020 is over, at least for now. Democrats alleged that the postmaster general, Louis DeJoy, a major Trump donor, was working to thwart mail-in voting by delaying delivery of the mail. Characteristically, Trump stoked the controversy by saying that if Democrats didn't get the additional funding for the post office in their latest stimulus bill, there could be no universal mail-in voting. In fact, the proposed \$25 billion is for a general bailout that has nothing to do with mail-in voting. And the policies pursued by DeJoy that have caused such consternation are either long-standing (decommissioning underutilized collection boxes) or overdue (changing delivery routines to eliminate excessive overtime pay). There is no reason to think the post office, which handles almost 3 billion pieces of mail a week, can't handle the increased volume from mail-in voting. But to assuage any fears, DeJoy has paused his reforms until after the election. This outrage should be returned to sender.

■ President Trump took four executive actions to provide economic relief during the pandemic. Two were small-bore, while two others raised constitutional concerns without giving Americans much real help. Having failed to get either party in Congress interested in a payroll-tax holiday, Trump suspended enforcement of the tax through the end of the year. But most companies will probably send the money to Washington anyway, rather than leave employees (or perhaps themselves) on the hook for the full amount in January. Trump also authorized a new channel for states to get federal money to provide extra unemployment benefits. But his scheme does not appear to be workable, and the administration keeps changing its story about key details. Trump is not the first president to succumb to the allure of acting in place of the legislature. In this case, however, there is no substitute for having the real one do its job.

■ Trump said that his action on the payroll tax is a prelude to a second-term push to abolish the tax altogether. It's an interesting idea, if an unlikely prospect. The payroll tax reduces employment and wages, and it contributes to the damaging fiction that Social Security and Medicare merely give back what taxpayers have put into the programs. But getting rid of the payroll tax—the largest tax most Americans pay—would require the federal government either to borrow even more or to raise other taxes that have their own harms. Spending on those programs continues to grow every year, faster than inflation and faster than the rest of the budget. Getting a handle on that problem is, unfortunately, something that the president, like most of our other political leaders, won't even muse about.



■ Two retired Army officers wrote a much-publicized open letter to General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urging him to order Trump's removal from the White House should Trump lose the election and then barricade himself there. It is irresponsible to indulge in such speculation, particularly without giving the matter serious thought—which the authors didn't do. If they had, they might have noticed that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs has no power, by statute, to give orders to anyone in the military; and it might have occurred to them that in the scenario they conjure, there would be a new, lawful president who could. In this febrile moment in our politics, some on the left are rationalizing a military coup in the name of saving the republic.

■ In a campaign ad, Joe Biden touts his 2016 meeting with Pope Francis and his subsequent encounter with a group of religious sisters outside St. Peter's Basilica. The nuns, Biden says, reminded him of his Catholic education and upbringing, and of the teaching that each of us is our brother's keeper. The ad appeared just weeks after Biden promised to reinstate Obamacare's coercive contraceptive mandate, which compels all employers, regardless of religious belief or conscience, to subsidize employees' birth control, including methods that can induce abortion. Responding to the Supreme Court's decision allowing the Trump administration to exempt religious orders such as the Little Sisters of the Poor from this mandate, Biden averred that his administration would undo those exemptions entirely. In characteristically disingenuous fashion, Biden praises nuns out of one side of his mouth while vowing from the other to compel them to violate the very faith he claims to profess.



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■ QAnon has achieved a political breakthrough. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has been an avid promoter of the deranged and elaborate conspiracy theory, won a House GOP primary runoff election in a heavily Republican Georgia district. As Greene explained at length in a bonkers 2017 video, supposedly QAnon is a high-ranking government official who is posting messages that cryptically reveal how President Trump is secretly working to take out a “global cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles” that includes prominent Democrats. Trump tweeted praise for Greene, but there’s no reason that congressional Republicans need to go along. They should shun her and deny her committee assignments. Any such move would surely lead Greene to conclude there is a conspiracy against her, but some paranoids deserve enemies.

■ The investigation of the investigators produced its first charge. John Durham, the Connecticut U.S. attorney assigned by Attorney General William Barr to examine “Russiagate,” charged former FBI associate general counsel Kevin Clinesmith with making a false statement. The offense arises out of Clinesmith’s tampering with a document: an email chain in which a CIA liaison informed him that former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page had been a covert CIA source. In the emails, the CIA recounted that, even before the FBI began seeking surveillance warrants against Page from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, the CIA told the bureau that Page had actually worked *for the U.S. against Russia*, not the other way around. Clinesmith’s actions concealed Page’s CIA status from the agent who was about to apply to renew the warrant, and concealed it from the court, too. His lawyer publicly insisted that Clinesmith had not intended to deceive his FBI colleagues or the FISA court, but Clinesmith ultimately pled guilty. This is good work by Durham, and there may be more to come.

■ The statistics are stark: The CDC estimates that this will be the worst year for gun-related homicides since 1999. The instances are wrenching: children shot and killed in strollers, at picnics, stepping from a parent’s car. Summer always sees a spike. This summer’s Matterhorn spike is enhanced by COVID cabin fever and protest saturnalia. But surely the main driver is the great unlearning of the lessons of the Nineties. It is possible to drive crime, including fatal shootings, down. Intelligent policing, backed by ample resources and determined politicians, did it first in New York City and then across the country. Fetishizing instances of police brutality and demeaning cops generally cause the public, politicians, and police officers to stand down. What fills the gap is not nice. “If men were angels,” James Madison memorably began a sentence. They aren’t; and too many of them are armed, dangerous, and unopposed.

■ Chicago residents beheld a strange and worrisome sight on the morning of August 10. A series of bridges across the Chicago River to the city’s inner core had been raised, severely limiting access to that area (along with other restrictive measures). The day before, Chicago police officers had returned fire on an armed, fleeing suspect about whom they had received a 911 call. Social-media rumors turned the still-living 20-year-old into a slaughtered 15-year-old. By nightfall, the now depressingly familiar spectacle of rioting and looting

flared up once more, as many took advantage of the ensuing chaos and lawlessness to raid and plunder some of Chicago’s finest establishments. Hence the need for temporarily restricted downtown access, last enforced in the aftermath of George Floyd’s death in May. But unless Chicago successfully restores civil peace and order, it seems inevitable that the bridges will go up again sometime soon.



■ Letitia James, the attorney general of New York, campaigned on the promise of investigating and doing damage to the National Rifle Association, which she describes as a “terrorist organization”; and, would you believe it, having conducted her investigation, she has determined that the group must be entirely and irrevocably dissolved! That James’s political aims and the results

of her investigation have lined up so perfectly must be one of the luckiest coincidences in recent memory. James claims that the NRA is guilty of “fraud.” But she has presented about as much evidence for this proposition as she has to back up her claims of “terrorism.” Like many political organizations in the United States, the NRA is indeed imperfect. But the imperfections she has examined are quotidian—misspent funds and the like—and their negative consequences attach solely to it and its members. Nobody could reasonably believe that the NRA has done anything so egregious as to justify having been singled out by New York. This is an abuse of office, and it must be rejected as such—by the voters, by the courts, and by any citizen who does not wish to see the precedent set, and repeated.

■ The New York City chapter of Democratic Socialists of America sent a list of questions to candidates for local office: routine for political groups of every stripe, possibly important in a midnight-blue locale like Gotham. The last two questions, the only ones related to foreign policy (not a heavy responsibility of local pols), stood out: Would candidates promise not to travel to Israel? Do they support the BDS movement (boycott, divestment, sanctions—against Israel)? The best response was from Tali Farhadian Weinstein, a candidate for Manhattan district attorney. “So let me get this straight. Per this questionnaire it would be ok for me to travel to Iran, the country of my birth, which hangs men for being gay and may stone women for adultery, but not to Israel.” The answer would seem to be, Yes, it would. Anti-Semites and democratic socialists have no problem with Iran.

■ Speaking of that chapter of the DSA: A leading socialist scholar, Adolph Reed—who grew up black in the segregated South—was invited to speak to it, but then disinvited for his unfavorable view of identity politics. Reed planned to discuss how the Left’s focus on race, at the expense of class, was insufficient as an explanation of racial disparities in the pandemic and ultimately counterproductive in achieving social justice. After numerous complaints, the DSA leaders and Reed agreed

to cancel the planned Zoom talk. If even a black Marxist is prevented from disagreeing with “anti-racist” orthodoxy, what hope does anyone else have?

■ After a two-year investigation, the Department of Justice has concluded that Yale’s racially weighted admission policy violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband gave the university until August 27 to rectify the situation before the United States government will sue “to enforce Yale’s Title VI obligations.” Because Yale receives millions of taxpayer dollars each year, it’s required to uphold the statutory standards outlined in the act. The investigation, triggered by complaints from Asian-American groups, found that the university has fallen spectacularly short of these standards. Race is not only used “at multiple points in [Yale’s] admissions process,” it is also the “determinative factor in hundreds of admissions decisions each year.” “Asian American and White applicants,” the report continues, “have only one-tenth to one-fourth of the likelihood of admission [of] African American applicants with comparable academic credentials.” If “systemic racism” means anything, this admissions process surely counts.

■ A three-judge panel from the Ninth Circuit—yes, *that* Ninth Circuit—has struck down California’s ban on “high capacity” firearm magazines, which has been in place since 2000. Writing for the majority, Judge Kenneth Lee reminded the state that “even well-intentioned laws must pass constitutional muster,” and concluded that, because California’s statute “strikes at the core of the Second Amendment—the right to armed self-defense,” it has to go. As Lee noted, the government’s claim that its measure is narrowly tailored is patently false, given that it applies even to the standard-issue magazines that ship with most new guns. At root, this case considered whether the government may bend reality to its will. The mere labeling of a device as “high-capacity” does not make it so, and, as Lee observed, the consequence of California’s linguistic gamesmanship has been that “half of all magazines in America are now unlawful to own” in the state. A welcome reprieve for the Bill of Rights—for now, at least.

■ The United Arab Emirates will become the third Arab state to normalize relations with Israel, President Trump announced from the Oval Office. In return, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to pause Israel’s plans to declare sovereignty over West Bank settlements. And in addition to trading ambassadors, the UAE and Israel will ink a number of bilateral agreements on everything from technology to culture. While the two countries have long cooperated on security matters under the table, normalization is a historic development, and already other Arab states are using it as political cover to pursue their own rapprochements with Israel. All of this furthers the prospect of stability in the region. Talks between Israel and Palestine have stalled, and by facilitating the UAE–Israel normalization agreement, President Trump has found another path to Middle East peace. Who stands to lose? Iran, Hamas, and jihadists, among others.

■ A catastrophic explosion on August 4 in the port of Beirut killed an estimated 163 people and injured thousands more.

The explosion was caused by 2,750 tons of the volatile chemical ammonium nitrate that had been improperly stored in a warehouse at the port for six years. The unstable Lebanese government—composed of numerous factions, including Hezbollah—was blamed for its inaction and lack of oversight, which led to the explosion, as well as its poor response to the ensuing devastation. The government’s ministers then resigned as a group in acknowledgment of their culpability. Already suffering under the strain of both the coronavirus and hyperinflation, Beirut’s residents must now deal with a physically shattered city.

■ Edward Snowden first fled to China. The United States charged him with espionage. Then he fled to Russia—where he has been since June 2013. In 2016, after the House Intelligence Committee released a bipartisan report on Snowden, Senator Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) said, “Edward Snowden is a traitor who is currently under the care, custody, and control of Russian security services.” Snowden, he said, “has done irreparable harm to U.S. national security.” Therefore, “any thought to pardoning Edward Snowden should be immediately dismissed by President Obama, or anybody seeking to hold the office of the president.” President Trump has signaled that he may soon pardon Snowden. Congresswoman Liz Cheney (R., Wyo.) said that Snowden is guilty of “the largest and most damaging” release of classified information in American history. “He handed over U.S. secrets to Russian and Chinese intelligence, putting our troops and our nation at risk. Pardoning him would be unconscionable.” Strong words, and justified.

■ President Trump issued executive orders targeting two Chinese technology companies that have millions of users outside of China. Effective September 20, the orders prevent U.S.-linked enterprises from doing business with TikTok, a popular video-sharing social network, and messaging app WeChat. This will essentially ban the apps, which the Trump administration and others worry will collect Americans’ data on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. TikTok has an off-ramp, being forced by Trump and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, in the form of a potential deal in which Microsoft will purchase it from its parent company. WeChat has no such option, and a ban seems imminent. That app, however, is also more insidious than TikTok. It’s a highly effective conduit of Communist Party disinformation meant to sway the Chinese diaspora in Western democracies. And it surveils those overseas Chinese, trapping them in Beijing’s digital panopticon. The CCP’s influence over the Internet must be rolled back.



■ In the past few weeks, the White House has also levied sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for human-rights violations and designated Beijing’s “Confucius Institutes” as diplomatic missions. While the second measure received the least press, it ranks among the most important steps toward ending Chinese subversion of American institutions. Ostensibly language-education centers, Confucius Institutes have long served as platforms for propaganda and espionage. In 2014, the American Association of University Professors found that “most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes feature nondisclosure clauses and unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China.” So pronounced is their effect that in the communities where Confucius Institutes are established, local news outlets grow friendlier towards Beijing, according to a study from University College Dublin. The new designation requires the institutes to disclose employee lists, funding sources, and details concerning their operations. It is long overdue.

■ Beijing’s campaign to remake Hong Kong in the authoritarian image of ordinary Chinese cities continues. The Hong Kong police force arrested pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai and paraded the septuagenarian around his newspaper’s headquarters in handcuffs for a photo op. In addition to Lai, the authorities swept up some of his sons and executives, as well as pro-democracy campaigner Agnes Chow. They were all released on bail within 48 hours, but the arrests were a new

question; Azar’s visit is a welcome sign that the White House is prepared to buck that trend.

■ Alexander Lukashenko is known as “Europe’s last dictator.” He has ruled Belarus for 26 years. He has stolen election after election, including the latest, on August 9. As before, democratic protesters spilled into the streets—and their blood spilled, at the hands of Lukashenko’s security forces. Yet the current demonstrations are bigger and bolder than ever before. Lukashenko is very concerned, and said, “Until you kill me, there will not be any more elections.” Like all dictators, everywhere, he has linked his own fate to that of the nation: “If you destroy Lukashenko, it will be the beginning of the end for you.” The United States should do all it can to assist democratic forces in Belarus. President Trump, in particular, should make clear that the United States is on the side of democracy, standing for the rights of men and women against their tyrants and torturers.

■ Earlier this year, U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson dealt with a particularly nasty bout of the coronavirus. He recovered, but the experience has changed him. For one, he has decided that his being “too fat” before infection made him more susceptible and his bout more painful. Obesity is indeed a coronavirus risk factor, and his honest self-assessment is welcome. But he also wishes to impose his health consciousness on the nation he governs. One aspect of this anti-obesity

Successive administrations have waffled on the Taiwan question; Azar’s visit is a welcome sign that the White House is prepared to **buck that trend.**

nadir for the city’s democrats, who have suffered a series of blows in recent weeks. They’ve continued their fight, albeit with increased caution, and it’s not clear how the cases will proceed. Like everyone else, though, they know that Hong Kong is not the city it once was, and that the Chinese Communist Party has finally acted on its hypothesis that the international response would fall short. As it has: The U.S. has imposed some sanctions, but few other nations have followed. The Trump administration should coordinate an international response, move to activate its congressionally authorized powers to go after banks that do business with the CCP’s enablers in the city, and welcome fleeing Hong Kongers to the United States with open arms. It’s time to take Beijing to the mat over Hong Kong.

■ Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar visited Taiwan on August 12—the first cabinet-level trip to the country in four decades. Against the backdrop of China’s belligerence, Azar’s trip was a necessary indication of Washington’s commitment to protecting freedom and the rule of law. Indeed, a keen awareness of the Chinese threat pushed Taipei to impose a travel ban before any other country had done so. As Azar noted, the island nation contained COVID-19 despite being barred from membership in the World Health Organization. Successive administrations have waffled on the Taiwan

push is a “ban on advertising of food high in fat, sugar, or salt on television and online before 9 P.M.” in the words of a U.K. Department of Health and Social Care official. We tend to recoil from the coercion of such government impositions, just as we question their utility. Promoting health and fighting obesity are noble goals. But Johnson ought to start with the man in the mirror, change his own ways, and try to lead by example.

■ At the foot of Willow Peak, believed to be Mount Horeb, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Saint Catherine’s Monastery has stood for 15 centuries, a node of Christian prayer in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. Egyptian prime minister Mostafa Madbouly visited in August and met with monks there, to announce the government’s plans for restoration projects within the walls of the monastery complex and for development of the airport at the nearby small city of St. Catherine, to facilitate travel for pilgrims and tourists. The “government is interested in boosting religious tourism,” the chairman of the Egyptian Cultural Heritage Preservation Organisation explained to the website Al-Monitor. With refreshing candor, he added that Egypt would benefit from Turkey’s recent decision to convert Hagia Sophia, originally an Orthodox church, from a museum into a mosque, suggesting that Christians who have an interest in holy sites and know where their faith is disrespected should understand that Egypt

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welcomes them. Given all the troubles faced by Christian communities striving to preserve their religious heritage in the Middle East, the cradle of the Church, be grateful for the government's somewhat mercenary but frank and genuine ecumenism and goodwill.



■ Kanye West courts risk. Some years ago he began designing clothes, actually trying to create something fresh, unlike the typical celeb influencer lending a name and a pout to the work of others. More recently, he became a Christian, courting the jibes of the cynical and the comfortable. Last month he announced that he was

running for president. One might analyze his positions—he opposes the prison-industrial complex (left/libertarian), abortion (right), and vaccines (nuts)—but that would be a category error. He has missed the ballot deadlines in 22 states and seen his petitions rejected in two. This is not a serious effort even by the looking-glass standards of Eric Swalwell or Ben Carson. It is a gesture of concern and, alas, delusion. West has been open about his struggles with bipolar disorder. He is blessed with talent, a business, family, and faith. That should be enough, and more than enough.

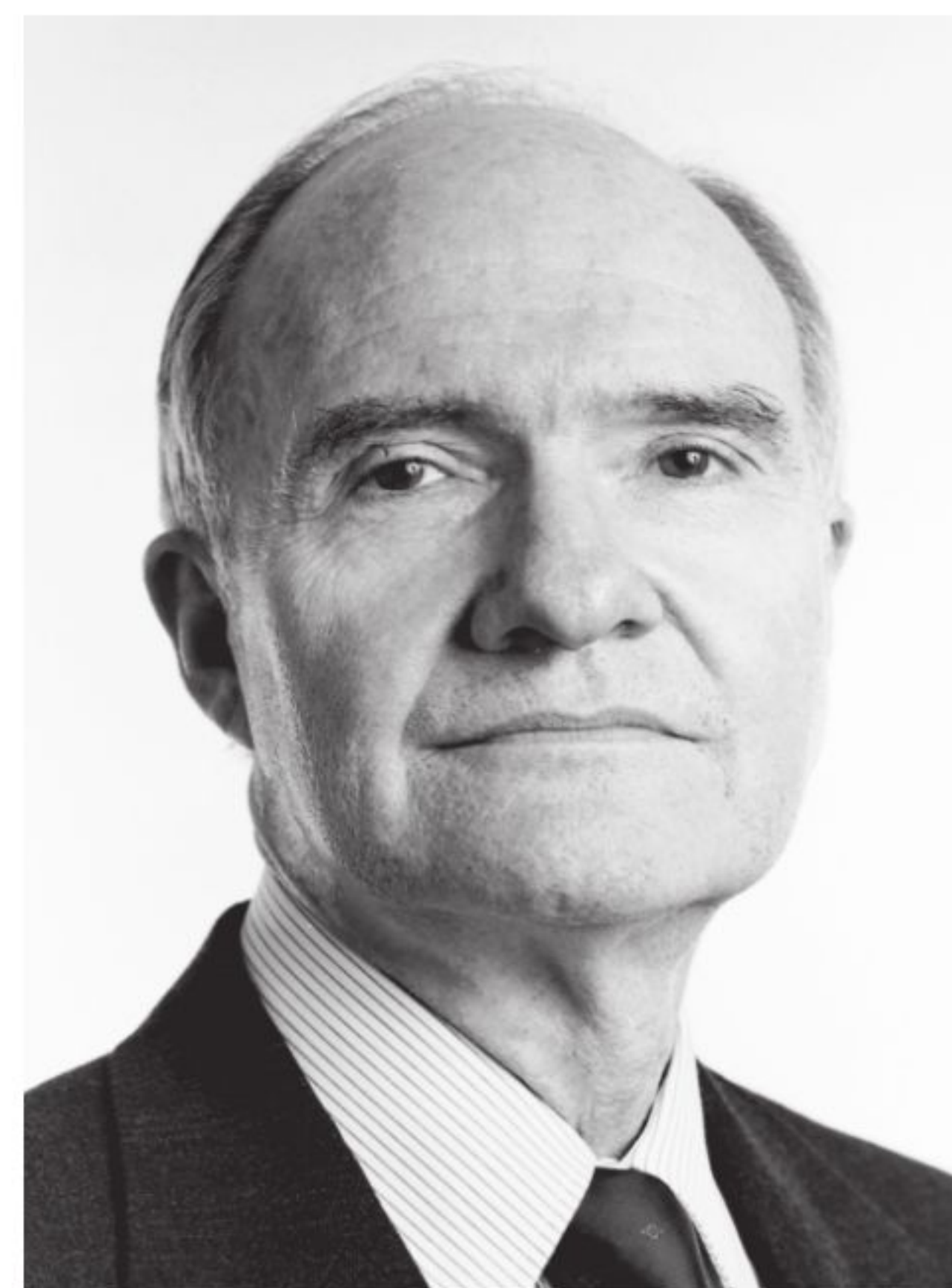
■ Edward Ball is among the many white Americans who have in their family tree at least one member of the Ku Klux Klan. To do “the unusual thing” and bring his white-supremacist ancestor “out of the closet to interrogate under light,” he wrote *Life of a Klansman: A Family History in White Supremacy*, published in August. A reckoning, it follows *Slaves in the Family* (1998), his account of his attempts to find and meet descendants of some of the nearly 4,000 men and women whom his family over the course of more than a century and a half had held in bondage. He was scheduled to speak at Tulane University in August, but the university canceled at the last minute, under the pressure of protest from students, alumni, and employees. “The last thing we need to do is allow someone who is even reflecting on the hatred of their ancestors to speak about white supremacy, even if their efforts come from a place of accountability,” wrote a student on Instagram. The campus anti-intellectual we will always have with us. In this case, the best revenge against him would be to buy and read Ball’s book.

■ In July, the presidents of the eight Ivy League universities, responding to the pandemic, announced a suspension of intercollegiate sports until January at the earliest. In the Patriot League, which includes Annapolis, West Point, and Colgate University, fall sports will be played, but with adjustments, including a ban on air travel to away games. In Division III of the NCAA, Williams, Swarthmore, Bowdoin, and Grinnell, among others, have canceled sports until next calendar year. In August, the University of Connecticut became the first Football Bowl Subdivision team to cancel its season. “These young men’s lives are more important than money,” said coach Randy Edsall. The financial squeeze that the pandemic has put on colleges has led

some to eliminate their programs for golf, tennis, and even soccer, baseball, and, in one case, football. In the contest between COVID and the NCAA, the wrong side appears to be winning, so sports fans will do what they have always done. They’ll wait until next year.

■ Jerry Falwell Jr. has taken an indefinite leave of absence from the presidency and chancellorship of Liberty University, at the request of its board of trustees. The announcement came days after he posted on Instagram a photo of himself, jeans slightly unzipped, with his arm around a young woman in a similar state of dishabille. The tawdriness of the mock-salacious pose was mild by some standards but not those that the administration of the Evangelical institution of higher learning expects its students and faculty to meet. Since Falwell, a lawyer, succeeded to the throne after the death of his father in 2007, he has been in the news too often for the wrong reason, including purported involvement in a complicated but lingering scandal said to involve hush money and racy photos of him and his wife. He has done himself and Liberty no favors by pressing every hot button he could find over the years, behaving as if the heart of his job description were to live large while owning the libs. Use your respite wisely, Mr. Falwell.

■ When Mel Brooks’s raunchy Old West comedy *Blazing Saddles* was released in 1974, it was rated R. In those days, the letter was enough to convey that there was sex in the movie, but not too much, and some vulgar language to go with it. Now the film is available on HBO Max, and it comes with a full-blown three-minute content warning. One might think the release date alone—or maybe even a brief notice along the lines of “WARNING: Old movie. Contains ethnic, sexual, and digestive humor”—would make it clear that *Blazing Saddles* does not live up to modern standards of wokeness. Instead, HBO hired a University of Chicago professor to explain that, “as the story line implies, the issue of race is front and center in *Blazing Saddles*.” Can’t argue with that. Moreover, “racist language [yes, she means *that* word] and attitudes pervade the film. But those attitudes are espoused by characters who are portrayed here as explicitly small-minded, ignorant bigots.” True enough. She goes on: “The real and much more enlightened perspective is provided by the main characters played by Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder.” *Blazing Saddles* is a lot of things, but one we wouldn’t have guessed is too mature and sophisticated for HBO viewers to handle on their own.



■ For about half a century, the name “Brent Scowcroft” was a byword for wisdom and sobriety in foreign policy. No one believes that Scowcroft was right about everything—who is?—but his knowledge, seriousness, and patriotism were respected by all. Scowcroft was born in 1925 in Ogden, Utah, the son of a grocer. He went to West Point, then joined the Air Force. He retired as a lieutenant general.

Along the way, he earned master's and doctoral degrees from Columbia University (international relations). He was a constant in the orbit of Henry Kissinger. He succeeded Kissinger as national-security adviser to President Ford. More than a decade later, he served as national-security adviser again, this time to President Bush the Elder. Other presidents, he served in a variety of capacities. He received nearly every relevant award you can think of, including an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace. Brent Scowcroft was the kind of person who gives "Washington establishment" a good name. He has died at 95. R.I.P.

■ Bernard Bailyn was the last of a cohort of scholars who revolutionized the teaching of the American Founding in the Fifties and Sixties, overthrowing the progressive paradigm that saw American patriots as motivated by their balance sheets. Bailyn and his peers—Edmund Morgan, Douglass Adair—instead took seriously what the Founders thought, said, and wrote. This focus kept their quadrant of academia safe from the storms of theory that battered the other humanities in the Seventies and later. Now it looks as if popular interest in the Founding must protect it from the newest wave of leftist disdain. Dead at 97, R.I.P.

DEMOCRATS

Kamala Harris Is **No Moderate**

As soon as Joe Biden picked Kamala Harris as his running mate, we were assured that she is a "moderate."

A moderate what? Moderate compared to whom?

Senator Harris is a moderate autocrat. During the Democratic-primary debates, she vowed to ban so-called assault weapons by executive order. When Joe Biden pointed out that the president has no such power and is obliged to follow the Constitution, she laughed in his face. As attorney general in California, she abused her investigatory and prosecutorial powers to harass conservative-leaning policy groups and was part of an alliance of Democratic attorneys general that tried to make a crime out of "climate denial," effectively seeking to criminalize dissent by pretending that it amounts to *securities fraud*, of all things. She sought to incarcerate the parents of truant children, and she worked overtime to uphold unjust convictions obtained through official misconduct and the fabrication of evidence.

Senator Harris is a moderate anti-Catholic bigot. Together with Senator Mazie Hirono (D., Hawaii), Harris argued that Brian Buescher, currently on the U.S. District Court for Nebraska, was unfit to serve on the bench because he is a member of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic social-service organization—"an all-male society comprised primarily of Catholic men," as Harris and Hirono put it. Senator Harris demanded: "Were you aware that the Knights of Columbus opposed a woman's right to choose when you joined the organization?" As though that were distinct from what the Catholic Church teaches at large.

Senator Harris is a moderate monopolist on health care, one who promised to *abolish* all existing health-insurance plans in favor of a single government-administered system (before retreating a couple of steps to allow for Medicare Advantage-style plans under the new system). We are squinting to see a definition of "moderate" in the American context that is "slightly to the right of Norway."

Senator Harris's health-care moderation is complemented by her moderately fervent embrace of open borders. She favors providing federal health-care benefits to illegal immigrants, but that's presumably on its way toward being a moderate position too, since they wouldn't be illegal if she had her way. That is because on immigration, she is a moderate in the sense that she endorses the decriminalization of unauthorized entry into the United States but would not actually load up a truck and make a coyote run herself.

Put another way: She would *decriminalize* unauthorized border crossing while *criminalizing* health insurance. This is a funny kind of moderation.

Senator Harris is a moderate ignoramus on the Constitution, proposing that the states be forced to obtain "pre-clearance" from the federal government before making changes to their abortion policies. Her moderate ignorance here is deployed in the service of her instinct toward moderate abortion fanaticism.

About all this, she has been, at best, moderately honest.

Her moderate honesty was very much on display during the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, when she made a despicable spectacle of herself and the Senate in her treatment of the tawdry—and, it is worth remembering, *false*—allegations against Kavanaugh. She insisted that Democrats' losing that fight would "cloud the legitimacy of the Supreme Court."

It is possible to exaggerate the legitimate concerns about Joe Biden's age and health. But it is not unreasonable to understand, as many Democrats and Republicans both do, that a Biden presidency might very well evolve into a kind of regency in which the fragile-seeming and forgetful man who would be 82 years old at the end of his first term acts as a placeholder until a suitable replacement comes of age, as it were. The leading candidate for such a successor would be his vice president, in this case a self-serving and dishonest politico who was moderately corrupt as an attorney general and moderately abusive as a senator, and is now moderately dangerous to the rule of law.

Americans should be moderately terrified.



Senator Kamala Harris



The Imperiled Hyde Amendment

A Biden presidency would threaten it as never before

BY JOHN McCORMACK

FOR four decades, Joe Biden opposed taxpayer funding of abortion as a fundamental matter of conscience. “I will continue to abide by the same principle that has guided me throughout my 21 years in the Senate: those of us who are opposed to abortion should not be compelled to pay for them,” Biden wrote to a constituent in 1994. “As you may know, I have consistently—on no fewer than 50 occasions—voted against federal funding of abortions.”

As he geared up for his ultimately unsuccessful 2008 presidential campaign, the Delaware senator reaffirmed this position in his book *Promises to Keep*: “I’ve stuck to my middle-of-the-road position on abortion for more than thirty years. I still vote against partial birth abortion and federal funding.”

As late as June 5, 2019—six weeks after Biden formally launched his 2020 bid—his campaign said he still supported the Hyde amendment, a measure, attached annually to federal legislation, that prohibits federal tax dollars from funding elective abortions under Medicaid. But after 24 hours of pummeling by Democratic rivals and activists, Biden reversed himself the next day, announcing he no

longer supported the Hyde amendment. His stated rationale for flip-flopping—that states were passing laws attempting to ban abortion—made little sense.

Biden’s abandonment of this core conviction because of political pressure is perhaps the lowest moment of his presidential campaign to date. As he had long said, those who understand that abortion is the taking of an innocent human life “should not be compelled to pay for them.”

Protecting conscience rights is indeed a weighty reason to support the Hyde amendment, but there is an even better reason to do so. What makes it the most important pro-life public policy since the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision is this: When you subsidize something, you get more of it, and this basic fact of social science holds true when that something is abortion.

One study by the Guttmacher Institute, a Planned Parenthood offshoot, found that in states that use their own tax dollars to pay for abortions undergone by Medicaid recipients, the abortion rate among Medicaid recipients is 3.9 times the rate among nonrecipients, “while in states that do not permit Medicaid funding for

abortions, Medicaid recipients are only 1.6 times as likely as nonrecipients to have abortions.”

The precise number of lives saved by the Hyde amendment is a matter of dispute, but according to a 2016 report by the Charlotte Lozier Institute, an organization affiliated with the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List, “the best research indicates that the Hyde Amendment has saved over two million unborn children” since the policy was first enacted in 1976.

That’s an average of 50,000 human lives saved from abortion each year.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg acknowledged in a 2009 interview that a major rationale for funding abortions for Medicaid recipients was that it would result in a culling of the poor, though she put it a bit more euphemistically. “Frankly, I had thought that at the time *Roe* was decided, there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don’t want to have too many of,” she said. “So that *Roe* was going to be then set up for Medicaid funding of abortion.” For that reason, the liberal Supreme Court justice said she was surprised that the Supreme Court did not strike down the Hyde amendment in the 1980 case *Harris v. McRae*.

After surviving that Supreme Court decision, the Hyde amendment was attached to bills funding Medicaid for four decades regardless of which party was in control of Congress and the White House. The first time around, in 1976, it was attached to an appropriations bill that Republican president Gerald Ford vetoed as exceeding his budget request; a supermajority of a Democratic Congress overrode the veto, thus enacting the policy into law. Jimmy Carter, Ford’s Democratic successor, supported the Hyde amendment. Democratic presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama officially opposed it, but there were enough moderate Democrats and pro-life Democrats in Congress that it survived overwhelming Democratic majorities in 1993 and 2009. (Although the prohibition on Medicaid funding for abortion survived the 2009–11 Congress, Democrats did expand federal subsidies for abortion via Obamacare exchanges in states that didn’t pass new laws banning such subsidies.)

But now, three factors mean that the Hyde amendment is in peril as never before.

First, the sitting Republican president's response to the pandemic and the protests this summer has been so unpopular that Democrats are more likely than not to control the White House, the House, and the Senate in 2021.

Second, because of partisan polarization and Democrats' purging of their own pro-life representatives, there are almost no supporters of the Hyde amendment left among congressional Democrats. In the Senate, Democrats Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Bob Casey Jr. of Pennsylvania both officially support it, but Republicans Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine oppose it. Even if the Democrats control the Senate by only a razor-thin majority, there would likely be majorities in both chambers to repeal the Hyde amendment.

Third, it is unlikely that filibuster rules would allow a GOP Senate minority to save the Hyde amendment in 2021.

If Democrats win control of the Senate, they may simply invoke the so-called nuclear option and eliminate the 60-vote threshold for all legislation. An increasing number of prominent Democrats, from Obama to Bernie Sanders, are calling for the abolition of the filibuster. Biden himself is now open to scrapping it.

Abolishing the filibuster would also give Democrats the opportunity to enact the Women's Health Protection Act, a federal law that would invalidate almost all state laws on abortion, including bans on late-term abortion that lack exceptions on the basis of the woman's emotional or mental health. Biden's vice-presidential nominee Kamala Harris is a co-sponsor of the act, and although Biden said in 1997 that he would like to "ban all post-viability abortions," he now speaks of his intention to "codify *Roe v. Wade*" into federal law. When congressional Democrats speak of "codifying" *Roe*, they mean enacting the Women's Health Protection Act; but Biden has not been asked about that specific piece of legislation.

Even in a scenario in which a Democratic Senate does not nuke the filibuster in 2021, it is likely that congressional Democrats would still find a way to nuke the Hyde amendment.

The annual budget-reconciliation process already provides Congress the opportunity to pass legislation with a simple majority in the Senate. The GOP Senate used reconciliation in 2017 to pass

its tax-reform bill, which also killed Obamacare's individual mandate and opened up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to energy exploration.

It is true that budget reconciliation is subject to complex Senate rules about what may or may not pass with a simple majority, and it's also true that in 2017 the Senate parliamentarian offered a preliminary opinion that adding Hyde-like protections to Obamacare's exchanges would require 60 votes.

But it's possible that Senate Democrats, without changing the rules at all, could come up with a creative way to provide unlimited taxpayer funding of abortion that would pass muster with the Senate parliamentarian, just as Senate Republicans found a creative way to pass a reconciliation bill defunding Planned Parenthood in 2015. As Oklahoma GOP senator James Lankford told NATIONAL REVIEW, "it is completely up to the parliamentarian on what they include and what they don't include. So that's somewhat of a wild card. It's fairly subjective at times."

If a Democratic Senate were to be thwarted by the parliamentarian in 2021, it could always overrule the parliamentarian. (Think of this as a "tactical nuking" of the filibuster.) If overruling the parliamentarian is necessary to enact, say, the "public Medicare-like option" that Joe Biden campaigned on, there is little doubt that Senate Democrats would do it. And if a Democratic Senate were to overrule the parliamentarian on any matter at all, they would also do it to kill the Hyde amendment.

Of course, unified Democratic control of the federal government is not a given in 2021. Polling now suggests Republicans are quite likely to lose the White House, but Democrats are only slightly favored to take the Senate.

Warning about the consequences of unchecked Democratic governance—on this issue and others—could improve GOP odds of holding on to the Senate. A poll conducted by Harvard for *Politico* on the eve of the 2016 election found that voters opposed repealing the Hyde amendment 58 percent to 36 percent.

Whatever else their merits, endangered Republicans can truthfully campaign on the fact that 51 warm Republican bodies in the upper chamber could be the only bulwark against unlimited taxpayer-funded abortion beginning in 2021. **NR**

Not (Necessarily) For Profit Alone

There's nothing wrong with corporations' taking the interests of workers and the community into account

BY RAMESH PONNURU

It was possible, back in 1970, to read an essay by an eminent libertarian economist in the *The New York Times Magazine*. Milton Friedman's byline appeared under a headline that both grabbed attention and accurately distilled his argument: "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits."

The CEO is an employee of shareholders, wrote Friedman, and his "responsibility is to conduct the business in accordance with their desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of the society." He should be charitable on his own time, and with his own money.

Friedman's essay remains influential 50 years later, but its ideas have always been contested. In August 2019, the Business Roundtable, a group of nearly 200 chief executives of the country's top businesses, released a "Statement on the Purpose of the Corporation." From 1997 onward, previous versions of the statement had endorsed the idea that corporations exist primarily to serve shareholders. The new statement omitted such language and instead affirmed a "commitment to all of our stakeholders" (emphasis in original): customers, employees, suppliers, "the communities in which we work," and shareholders, all listed in that order.

The new statement has been drawing criticism ever since, from opposite directions. Some prominent conservatives and libertarians have criticized the Roundtable for abandoning Friedman's wisdom and thereby aiding socialism and corporatism, and also for undermining managers' accountability to

shareholders. The *Wall Street Journal* has lashed the statement repeatedly, in one case running excerpts from Friedman's essay as a rebuke. Contributors to NATIONAL REVIEW's new "Capital Matters" project have taken the same view. Nikki Haley, widely considered a contender for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024, said that the Roundtable had turned its back on capitalism.

The other major line of criticism, mostly from the left but also from activists associated with populist nationalism, is that the CEOs haven't changed enough. Their alleged commitment to employees hasn't kept many of them from instituting large-scale layoffs during the pandemic. Even before then, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.) had said that corporate commitments to stakeholders besides their shareholders should be put into law: We can't trust CEOs "to make that change voluntarily."

selves as serving their customers, employees, and so forth, as well as their shareholders. They weren't pledging to *start* serving them.

A forthcoming study from the Harvard Law School Program on Corporate Governance aims to puncture the "illusory promise" of the statement but mainly succeeds in proving that it has an illusory premise. Two researchers contacted the companies whose CEOs signed the statement to see if their boards of directors had agreed to the decision. Only one of the 48 companies that responded said its board had done so. Their study concluded that the CEOs did not mean for the statement to lead to major changes in their conduct or their companies' conduct. This finding should not be scandalous or even surprising, though, given that nothing in the statement suggested major changes were needed or on the way.

The Friedmanite criticism of the Roundtable is at least based on a core of

to shareholders, customers, or employees, "in effect" imposing taxes and acting as a civil servant. Among his examples of such misguided actions were attempts to reduce pollution "beyond the amount that is in the best interests of the corporation or that is required by law," and "to hire 'hardcore' unemployed instead of better qualified available workmen." This spending should, in Friedman's view, be done either by the stockholders, employees, and customers on their own, or by a government operating under constitutional checks and balances.

But in some cases, companies can advance social goods more readily than either individuals or governments. Refraining from pollution may sacrifice less in profit to a company than funding a government clean-up effort would cost. A company might be better able to help people who have been unemployed a long time find productive

It is **simply and obviously untrue** that our choices are either the single-minded maximization of profit by businessmen, or socialism.

To prove they mean what they say, she explains, the executives should support her "Accountable Capitalism Act," which among other things requires that 40 percent of seats on corporate boards go to "worker representatives."

The first group of critics takes vindication in the second: The business group, they say, is just encouraging the Left by surrendering capitalist principles. But both sets of criticisms are mistaken. They misunderstand the CEOs' statement. The conservative critics make a deeper error, though, tying themselves to a view of business that is unrealistic and politically self-destructive.

The error about the statement is simple: The critics took it to be a repudiation of previous business practices and a promise of change. The conservatives were upset about the repudiation, and both sides were skeptical of the promise. These reactions ignored the Roundtable's own explanation for its revision: It wanted to align its description of the purpose of a corporation with the actual views and behavior of its members. CEOs already saw them-

real disagreement. There is no doubt that Friedman, whose essay accused businessmen who say that businesses have responsibilities other than making profits of "preaching pure and unadulterated socialism," would have hated the organization's statement. But one can admire much of Friedman's career while thinking this essay was not his most rigorous work.

In the first place, even making allowances for hyperbole, it is simply and obviously untrue that our choices are either the single-minded maximization of profit by businessmen, or socialism. Jamie Dimon, the chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase and chairman of the Roundtable, can believe that providing useful employment is a worthwhile goal in its own right without believing that the government should own a significant number of businesses. He does not fall into logical incoherence in affirming the first view and rejecting the second.

Friedman wrote that a CEO who spends corporate money charitably is taking money that would otherwise go

work than the government or a non-profit group. Libertarians and conservatives ought to be open to this possibility if anyone is.

Recall that Friedman had written that corporate managers should follow shareholders' wishes, which will "generally" be for financial rewards. Some shareholders may, however, have desires that include minimizing pollution or furthering a charitable project, and others may be indifferent to it up to a point. Friedman warned that stockowners may fire an executive whose sense of "social responsibility" reduces their net worth, and that customers and employees may desert him too. But this observation cuts against his argument, not for it. It means that there is an inbuilt restraint on corporate management's do-gooding that undermines shareholders' interests; and it means that the "tax" being imposed is voluntary, which is to say that it's not very much like a tax.

After arguing on principle, Friedman turned to a point of political strategy. Businessmen who give speeches about

social responsibility, he wrote, “strengthen the already too prevalent view that the pursuit of profits is wicked and immoral and must be curbed and controlled by external forces. Once this view is adopted, the external forces that curb the market will not be the social consciences, however highly developed, of the pontificating executives; it will be the iron fist of Government bureaucrats.”

The Roundtable statement does not, of course, suggest that seeking a return for shareholders is wicked; it reiterates the goal. But these words have not preempted the Friedmanite criticism. Four distinguished Hoover Institution fellows, including former secretary of the Treasury and secretary of state George Shultz, have suggested that instead of saying that they wish to serve employees, suppliers, and so forth, business executives should be explaining how the pursuit of profit for shareholders ultimately benefits everyone. Left unexplained is why they cannot do both. The stylized model of the purely profit-seeking enterprise is illuminating about the good it can do. But it is not a description of how businessmen actually operate, nor an ethical ideal from which all real-world departures should be condemned.

Haley, intending to critique the Roundtable statement, wrote that “a company that cheats its customers, mistreats its workers and abuses its community won’t be around long.” The statement is intelligible as a criticism, though, only if corporate executives are obliged on principle to stay confined to a rhetorical straitjacket: only if, that is, it is acceptable to say, “We will seek profit by treating our customers and employees well,” but unacceptable to say, “We will seek profit and treat our customers and employees well.”

Large businesses are complex social institutions that answer to multiple constituencies. Their leaders could pretend otherwise and declare that in their jobs they think only and ever about stock prices. Would that pretense make it easier or harder for them to resist the unwise demands of Senator Warren and her allies? Friedman’s latter-day disciples may find that they have undermined liberty and shareholders’ interests by defending them in too doctrinaire a fashion.

NR

The New Segregationists

How progressives contribute to systemic racism

BY MARIO LOYOLA

THE Black Lives Matter movement, we are told, has heralded a “national reckoning” on race. Every example of racial disparities—from arrest rates to income inequality—is now proof of systemic racism, with guilt apportioned by social category, on a *cui bono* basis. That bodes ill for this reckoning, because many and perhaps most racial disparities today arise not from racial discrimination, but rather from the very policies that progressives are now insisting we need more of.

Just like “Black Lives Matter,” the phrase “systemic racism” means different things to different people. For the more radical activists, those slogans are meant to highlight a whole system of oppression and power that produces racially disparate outcomes. BLM’s founders claim that in America black lives “are systematically targeted for demise.” For them inequality is an inescapable part of the evil of capitalism. Hence their demands are almost uniformly Marxist.

Meanwhile, most ordinary BLM supporters, particularly those who live in affluent suburbs, use the phrase “systemic racism” in a much vaguer way, often just to highlight the racist attitudes that allegedly persist subconsciously in our institutions and habits. Of course, they have also succumbed to the bigotry that defines conservatives as “racists” and “white supremacists” and “fascists,” so they think they’re standing against all of that. But they themselves are often paragons of privilege: Despite the BLM signs on their professionally manicured front lawns, they have no intention of changing their hiring practices, or of donating a percentage of their income to

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BLM organizations every year, or of doing without police when they need them, or of giving in to any other BLM demand. According to various Pew polls, while 61 percent of American whites support the BLM movement, only 35 percent have a positive view of socialism, only 7 percent have a “very positive” view of socialism, and fully 65 percent view capitalism favorably.

Clearly, there is a considerable disconnect among the various factions of the BLM movement. But these disparate factions have several important things in common. They want to help black people, and they think progressive policies will help. They also ignore how often those policies are the very cause of the systemic racism that they think they’re fighting. And they increasingly support the frankly segregationist idea that discrimination on the basis of race is okay if it results in equity—the argument of the

of 911 calls from black neighborhoods. BLM supporters claim that police are unfairly targeting black neighborhoods and black lives because they are racist. The necessary implication is that 911 calls are evenly distributed but the police are largely ignoring those that come from white neighborhoods. That is patently absurd, and even if true would only show preferential treatment for *black* victims of crime.

It is indeed horrible that police in many cities spend most of their time chasing after suspects who are black. It is horrible that more than 5 percent of black males are in prison at any given time, well over five times the incarceration rate of whites. But criminal suspects in New York City are disproportionately black for the simple reason that victims of crime in the city are disproportionately black and most crime in the United States is intra-racial. Laying the blame for this state

Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The 1965 Moynihan Report was particularly pessimistic in looking at the impact of welfare on families. Not only does welfare seek to protect women from having to depend on a husband, it in effect disincentivizes marriage. The report proved all too prophetic, as the proportion of black children born to unwed mothers has soared to 80 percent in the decades since.

The dysfunctions of the welfare state are well understood, at least among conservatives and some of the more courageous progressives. What is less well understood about welfare is perhaps its most reprehensible aspect: It replaced the state segregation laws of Jim Crow with an enormous federal program of segregation, albeit one that is indirect and unwitting.

Welfare benefits set the bait, luring the lowest-skilled part of the labor

Wouldn’t people who are truly committed to **improving black lives** want to be honest in acknowledging root causes, even if they themselves may be partly to blame?

best-selling book *How to Be an Anti-racist*. Most have only the best of intentions, but their tendency to imagine racism everywhere leaves them blind to all of the ways that progressive policies foment and entrench the very racial disparities they abhor.

If it is bad to have racial disparities in virtually every metric of social well-being, is it not vital to uncover the cause? Wouldn’t people who are truly committed to improving black lives want to be honest in acknowledging root causes, even if they themselves may be partly to blame?

Let’s start with the disparities in arrest rates and police brutality. The disparities are not just real, but astonishing. According to reports from the New York Police Department, black men are arrested and prosecuted in about 60 to 70 percent of every category of violent crime, though they are just over 10 percent of the city’s population. One major reason for this disparity is the disproportionate number

of affairs on racism is contradicted by obvious facts.

Someone who is really interested in solving these problems might start by asking this question: Why are so many of our country’s most crime-ridden neighborhoods black? High rates of crime and vagrancy are highly correlated with other social dysfunctions, such as dependency on welfare, low labor-force participation, and family breakdown. Of course, these are the very failures that conservatives have spent generations criticizing the welfare state for. Nicholas Eberstadt takes a hard look at those failures in his 2014 pamphlet *The Great Society at 50* and astutely notes that, if welfare policies are not the exclusive cause of the social dysfunctions of the Great Society, welfare is at the very least financing them.

This was all widely predicted at the dawn of the Great Society by, among others, one of Lyndon Johnson’s assistant secretaries of labor, the future

force away from jobs, forcing children into single-parent homes, and depriving millions of adults of the greatest vehicle of upward social mobility available to them: the workplace.

These are no mere carrots. There’s a stick as well. If you lose some part of an entitlement because of something you’ve done, that loss is the economic equivalent of a tax penalty on your behavior. Poor people are not merely enticed into dependency; they are severely punished when they try to get out of it. Thus welfare, the crown jewel of the progressive agenda, levies a punitive tax on poor women who stay married, on poor parents who work, and on poor workers who acquire new skills and look to increase their household’s income.

By virtually every measure of human welfare (except perhaps the government’s official poverty rate), American society has made enormous gains since the 1960s, and that includes blacks. Though the main

driver has been America's amazing economic growth over the last half century, the anti-poverty programs and—more important—the civil-rights movement have certainly contributed to a more equitable distribution of gains. Yet, as Thomas Sowell has pointed out, black household incomes rose more in the decades before the Great Society programs than they have since.

At the creation of these programs, Lyndon Johnson made clear that the purpose of welfare was “not to make the poor more secure in their poverty but to reach down and to help them lift themselves out of the ruts of poverty.” To the extent the Great Society was meant to enhance upward social mobility, it has not only abjectly failed, it has accomplished the opposite. In fact it pays to accomplish the opposite: The U.S. spends more per capita on social welfare than any country in the socialist paradise of Scandinavia, a solution that creates the very problem that it is supposed to solve.

Arguably the worst impacts of the welfare state arise from the systematic exclusion of the least-skilled quintile of working-age people from the workforce. Because families that depend on welfare tend to remain on it for generations, tend to live in government-sponsored affordable housing, and tend to stay out of the productive economy except as consumers, one little-noticed consequence of welfare is the long-term segregation of the poor. And because poor people tend to be disproportionately black, the chief victims of this insidious new segregation are black. If the civil-rights movement triumphed in ending many racist practices, including the discrimination in housing that had kept blacks marginalized for generations, the new welfare programs often cut the other way.

It is a stark reminder of the dangers of judging policies by their intentions rather than their results. This is how Democrats, though perhaps with the best of intentions, keep blacks in a state of *political* dependency—dependent on the benevolence and charity of affluent whites who live somewhere else, a dark and shameful tradition that has survived in one form or another for more than 200 years. NR

The Abusive-Boyfriend Left

Claims of victimhood can be a form of manipulation

BY SPENCER CASE

MANY of us are familiar with the type of possessive boyfriend who tells his girlfriend that she's betraying him by casually chatting with another man. Or the girlfriend who says she'll engage in self-destructive behavior—go off her medication, binge-drink, or even commit suicide—if her boyfriend leaves her. In both cases, one partner says, “You're hurting me!” or “You'll make me hurt myself!” as a means of controlling the other. Most people consider this kind of manipulation to be objectionable in relationships. But it's equally objectionable—and increasingly common—in political activism.

A case in point: Consider how the concept of “violence” has been expanded (and then, once expanded, selectively applied) so that any resistance to left-wing ideas can now be equated with violence. In a 2019 opinion piece for *Inside Higher Education*, for example, a Georgetown professor of philosophy said that rejecting self-identification as the sole criterion for being a man or a woman amounts to “complicity with systemic violence and active encouragement of oppression.”

It's no less manipulative to say “You're hurting others!” than to say “You're hurting me!” if you lack justification for saying either. Many political accusations of harm, like the one I just mentioned, are plainly unreasonable. One difference might be that the boyfriend *intends* to manipulate his partner, whereas the activist has righteous objectives. But I'm not sure we'd think more highly of an abusive boyfriend who really believed himself

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to be the victim. Moreover, as we shall see, it's unlikely that those who resort to this kind of rhetoric in politics are always guided by noble intentions.

This analysis is harsher than another criticism of the contemporary activist Left. In *The Coddling of the American Mind*, Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff argue that much campus mischief reflects enculturated oversensitivity (“safetyism”) and sincere acceptance of bad ideas. To my mind, Haidt and Lukianoff exaggerate the role of “bad ideas and good intentions.” Vice, and particularly a taste for the pleasure of controlling others, plays a larger role than they acknowledge in motivating bad behavior.

Exhibit A is the “Day of Absence” controversy that roiled Evergreen State College for several days in May 2017. In one widely publicized episode during this affair, assembled students shouted down the university president, George Bridges, for gesticulating normally as he addressed them. Allegedly, some students found this threatening. Someone yelled, “Stop pointing, George!” Bridges appeared momentarily stunned and then obeyed, meekly announcing: “My hands are down.” The crowd burst out in applause and laughter. Bridges held his hands up as if to say, “I surrender.”

In another incident, protesters surrounded the library building and barricaded the exits with furniture. Some of them interrupted a faculty meeting inside and stole a cake about to be served in honor of retiring professors. They carried it out and handed pieces to their fellow demonstrators. Others gathered outside Bridges' office and refused to let him leave. Bridges said, “I need to pee” and was told to hold it, eliciting laughter. Two protesters eventually escorted him to the restroom.

These students exhibited a streak of cruelty. Clearly many of them relished controlling and humiliating others, especially authority figures. Bridges, for his part, complied as if he'd contracted an ideologically induced form of Stockholm syndrome. Both the events at Evergreen State College and the ongoing antics of the transgender-rights movement (e.g., efforts to suppress research they disagree with and discredit the academics who produce it) are extreme examples of this kind of

manipulation. But it's not hard to find milder cases of the same thing.

Consider a less publicized incident that occurred at the University of Colorado Boulder last fall. On October 6, a white woman who was unaffiliated with the university (and mentally unwell) entered the Engineering Center at night and berated some of the black students there, repeatedly deploying the N-word. A professor confronted her and threatened to call the police if she didn't leave. She left and was later charged with misdemeanor harassment.

A video of the unpleasant exchange appeared on social media, putting the university in a negative light. The student on the receiving end of the woman's tirade told *Inside Higher Education*, "I've been in this country for the past five years and have been attending this school for the past three years, and I must say this is the first time I've experienced such a thing." Others, however, insisted that this was no anomaly, but an illustration of a systemic problem: Drastic, university-wide remedies were necessary for nonwhite students to feel safe on campus.

On October 7, CU Boulder's Black Student Alliance released a list of five "demands" from the administration. One was that "the university develop a system-wide initiative that names and condemns racism, racial profiling and all other forms of white supremacy in any manifestation." The university was, of course, already stridently opposed to even subtle racism. Its Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance classifies "identity-based jokes or comments that create a hostile environment" as harassment. The statement acknowledges none of these efforts, and makes the further demand that

the University, in collaboration with the Black Student Alliance and ally organizations, develop an initiative to better train staff, faculty, CU Campus Police, and current and incoming students on the school's commitment to anti-racism, de-escalation of hostile situations, and reporting procedures.

This is a proposition that needs to be debated, since the BSA and "ally organizations" don't seem politically unbiased, to put it mildly. But these are *demands*, not proposals up for discus-

sion. The statement ends with: "We give the university and its leadership 48 hours to respond to our demands." Immediately beneath are an image of the iconic raised fist of solidarity and the signatures of the BSA leadership. This raises the question: "Or else what, exactly?"

We'll probably never know, since Chancellor Philip DiStefano agreed to meet with them within the specified time. The day before that meeting, DiStefano condemned the incident in a speech and promised to work with students for reform. Many students in attendance were unimpressed that he devoted a mere five minutes out of an hour-long speech to the incident (how much time would have been enough?). About half walked out in protest. When DiStefano finally met with the BSA, the two sides swiftly, in his words, "reached agreement on a path forward." On Twitter, the BSA triumphantly enumerated the concessions that DiStefano had made.

On November 16, the *Boulder Daily Camera* ran an opinion piece by DiStefano rolling out a sweeping new diversity initiative, the IDEA Plan (the title stands for "Inclusion, Diversity & Excellence in Academics"). DiStefano connected the plan to the Engineering Center incident, blandly adding: "Following that incident, a collaboration arose between my administration, the Black Student Alliance, the CU Student Government and other student groups and allies." According to a university statement, the IDEA Plan would, *inter alia*, "move accountability for diversity and inclusion from the periphery to *core institutional functioning*" (emphasis mine).

This episode, in all likelihood, wasn't entirely a matter of the administration capitulating to the BSA; the mini-crisis afforded it an opportunity to roll out a plan that was already in the works. The administration appeared to jump at the opportunity to gain favor with student activists. The BSA, for their part, didn't seem worried that their disrespectful tone—indeed, statements that could be construed as threatening—would backfire. They must have known that they could have simply requested a meeting and gotten one.

The cycle then repeated itself. On May 29, 2020, CU Boulder students and

BSA members Ruth Woldemichael and Olivia Gardner circulated a petition that made several more demands, with the word "DEMAND" in capital letters. These include that "the University of Colorado Police Department ceases any partnerships with the Boulder Police Department immediately" and "the University of Colorado reinvest 1% of the endowment in supporting businesses and initiatives run by formerly incarcerated people."

The petition ends: "We DEMAND a reply to this concern within 24 hours of receipt." Soon afterwards, the two students told the *CU Independent* that DiStefano had emailed them, again making concessive noises. The chancellor was apparently short on specifics, however, and it's unclear whether his email satisfied their exacting schedule. Nevertheless, the university has since shown its seriousness about intensifying its commitment to "anti-racism."

In June, CU Boulder issued a statement expressing solidarity with the protests that followed the slaying of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Some of its language implies that no disagreement with this position will be tolerated. For example, we learn that "real changes to our campus culture to combat systemic racism and bias-motivated behavior" will inform the "community values" that are put forward as "a bottom line, non-negotiable condition of enrollment and employment."

Perhaps such tactics are justifiable in truly desperate times when the stakes are high. But this kind of manipulation has become routine and predictable. Everyone is reading from a tired script. The identarian Left has settled into a calcified habit of saying things like "We don't feel safe!" and "Stop hurting us!" to get their way, just as Bridges, DiStefano, and others like them habitually abase themselves and grant concessions. It's an awkward arrangement, not least because it's hard to convincingly pose as powerless rebels when the people in charge of important institutions are so eager to comply with your wishes.

It's too late to stop the normalization of this behavior. It has already become essentially institutionalized at universities and, increasingly, elsewhere. But we'd do well to remind ourselves that it's vicious in relationships and politics alike. **NR**

Dear Richard; Sincerely, Donald

*A look at the Trump–Nixon
correspondence*

BY DAVID HARSANYI

“I did not see the program, but Mrs. Nixon told me that you were great on The Donahue Show. As you can imagine, she is an expert on politics, and she predicts that whenever you decide to run for office you will be a winner!”

—Richard Nixon to Donald Trump,
December 21, 1987

THE silk-tied real-estate tycoon whom Pat Nixon witnessed on NBC the afternoon of December 14, 1987, is in most ways the same self-promoting, sarcastic, brashly populist force that voters see today. At 41 years of age, Trump was at the height of his real-estate success—“no

Richard Nixon Library in Yorba Linda (the date depending on when California can finally open for business).

One won’t find deep camaraderie or warmth in the correspondence. Both Trump and Nixon, however, did share an acute disdain for the journalists, intellectuals, and elites who underestimated and undermined them at every turn. “I know nothing about the intricacies of your business enterprises, but the massive media attack on you puts me in your corner!” the former president wrote the mogul in the summer of 1990.

It’s also clear that both craved the acceptance of those they dismissed. The exiled Nixon, then still the butt of jokes and a target of opprobrium from journalists, regularly praised Trump’s media triumphs. He was more wounded by rejection than Trump probably ever would be.

On December 24, 1987, Trump thanked Nixon for the kind words about his *Donahue* appearance, enclosing a videotape of the program and a copy of his new book, signed to Nixon and to Pat, “a truly wonderful lady.” Trump had been trying to lure the Nixons into his shiny new 58-floor building, Trump Tower. It was not to be.

We don’t know whether Nixon ever sat down and watched the tape, but if he did,

Why, Donahue wondered, did a man with the “power and influence” of Trump take things so personally? Why did he feel the need to describe New York mayor Ed Koch as a “moron”? Trump, mischievously grinning, his rhetoric overflowing with absolutes, notes that Koch was the *most* corrupt and incompetent mayor *ever* to govern the city. Neither Jimmy Walker nor William O’Dwyer, after all, had ever tried to strip Trump of residential tax abatements.

Trump sent his first letter to Nixon in June 1982, enclosing a photo of a lunch the two had shared at the 21 Club: “I think that you’re one of this country’s great men, and it was an honor to spend an evening with you.” What did they talk about? Perhaps their upbringing. Perhaps their grievances against the press. Perhaps politics.

In truth, the only policy discussion found in the Nixon–Trump letters concerns the Vietnam War. “It is indeed gratifying to note that after ten long years, the American people appreciate the sacrifice of those who served the nation in a long and difficult war,” Nixon told Trump after the latter had participated in his charitable venture for veterans. The former president pointed out that New York mayor John Lindsay had quipped in 1970 that “our best

Nixon privately skewered his opponents in the severest terms. Trump has **never been inhibited** by norms of polite society.

one has done more at this age,” he told Donahue—flogging the book that would be read by every wealth-conscious New Yorker of the ’80s, *The Art of the Deal*. Watching Trump’s *Donahue* interview today, one can see why Pat foresaw a political future for the man.

Nixon’s letter predicting Trump’s electoral success is relatively well known, but by the time the real-estate mogul appeared on *Donahue*, he and Nixon had been exchanging fawning correspondence for more than five years—and would continue doing so into the 1990s. A cache of previously unreleased correspondence between the former and future president will be part of the soon-to-be opened *Presidents’ Club* exhibit at the

he would surely have been impressed by the future president’s breezy dismissal of the unreliable and undisciplined characters—the “flakes”—he had encountered on his climb to the top. Nixon, one also imagines, would have nodded knowingly when Trump extolled the virtues of men Trump deemed strong and loyal.

“If people screw me, I screw back in spades,” Trump had told a reporter at *Newsweek* earlier that year. Nixon privately skewered his opponents in the severest terms. Trump has never been inhibited by norms of polite society. Nixon quietly nursed his grudges for decades. No one has ever had to guess who is on Trump’s Enemies List.

young men went to Canada.” He, Nixon, had responded in his book *No More Vietnams* that “our bravest young men went to Vietnam.”

Trump concurred in May 1985, noting his “extraordinary respect and admiration” for Nixon’s most unappreciated accomplishment: “You did a great service to this country when you extricated us from the war in Vietnam.”

These exchanges, however, come off as perfunctory. What Nixon seemed most interested in discussing was the New York Generals of the upstart United States Football League, which operated in the early ’80s. To judge from his letters, Nixon was the biggest fan the team had in its short history.

Nixon's longest letter to Trump, sent September 23, 1983, contains the only instance of the former president's openly offering Trump, who had bought the Generals earlier that month, any unsolicited advice. Nixon, a former varsity football player, had thoughts on both the fiscal and coaching sides of professional sport. Concentrate on lowering ticket prices and filling the stadium, Nixon counseled, because fans are "indispensable props for the television broadcast, which in the future is where the real money lies."

While Nixon had a number of inherent gifts, it's fair to say that Donald Trump didn't need a lesson from him on the power of television.

Nixon stressed drafting as a way to build a team. "It's a miracle," he wrote, that star running back Herschel Walker "did as well as he did considering the weakness of the offensive line." A month later, Trump was appreciative—"Your opinions on world events are beyond doubt, but now I hope to be able to obtain some wise football advice as time goes by"—and conceded that for Walker "to have gained 1700 yards with almost no line is incredible."

This is the only time that Trump sounded even remotely like an actual sports fan. Nixon, on the other hand, couldn't stop writing about football. After Pat took a tour of Trump Tower in the fall of 1983, Nixon wrote, "I hope everything goes well with all your ventures—and particularly with the most interesting even though least profitable one—the Generals." After praising Trump for a *Time*-magazine profile in April 1984, Nixon said he was certain the Generals would live up to Trump's "standard of excellence" and "go all the way."

In May 1985, Nixon wrote, "I am still rooting hard for the Generals and for the U.S.F.L. Only your strong leadership will enable both to survive."

Neither the team nor the league survived into the next season. In 1985, at the behest of Trump, league owners voted to move from a spring to a fall schedule and directly compete with the National Football League. Trump's ultimate goal wasn't to create a thriving alternative league but to force a merger with the NFL. "Too often I feel like a one-man band," Trump complained to Nixon about his fellow owners.

The former president didn't view the USFL as a competitor against the NFL. Nixon—football-obsessed from his youth, an attender of games during his presidency, a sender of notes with play-calling advice to NFL coaches—genuinely loved the game. He stressed to Trump that Americans who did not enjoy basketball or hockey were excited about football all year long.

Trump ignored Nixon's advice and pushed owners to file an antitrust lawsuit against the NFL in 1986. The USFL won the suit but was awarded only \$1 in damages. The decision killed the league, which lost somewhere around \$163 million during its short existence and had no chance going head-to-head with the NFL. Neither man brought it up again, but it's certain Nixon was greatly disappointed.

Despite all the alleged similarities between the two, including their political tribulations, they made an unlikely pair. Nixon grew up in poverty in a Quaker household in Whittier, Calif. Harvard accepted him, but his brother was ill and his convalescence was costly, so Nixon stayed in his hometown, helped run the family grocery store and care for his brother, and attended a local college. He would later take scholarships to attend the new law school at Duke, enlist to serve in the Navy during World War II in his 20s, and climb every rung with awkward determination.

Trump, the kid who tooled around his dad's construction sites, would be bequeathed wealth and ride the turmoil of New York's real-estate explosion to great riches. Trump married former Eastern European models. Nixon, who never went to Le Club or Studio 54, married his equal in Pat, a woman who worked her way through college in the 1930s, sweeping floors and answering telephones. And he stayed married to her until her death in 1993.

Trump is a man of instinct, Nixon was all pragmatism. One of them is happy to talk about his high IQ, the other was among the most intelligent but enigmatic men ever to occupy the White House. It's fascinating that the two presidents developed a friendship, but the letters between them tell us something we already know: Donald Trump is what you see. Richard Nixon never was. **NR**

Against Disunion

A 1991 book by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., vital for today

BY JAY NORDLINGER

VERY rarely does the whole world face the same problem at the same time. I'm not talking about the staples: aging, want, crime, and the rest. I'm talking about something specific, such as the coronavirus. It is truly a common enemy, worldwide. It's as though Earth had been invaded by hostile extraterrestrials.

Has this extraordinary situation served to draw the world closer? Not that I can tell.

Well, how about the coronavirus in one country (to adapt a phrase from Stalin)? I have the United States in mind. Has this common enemy served to draw Americans closer? On the contrary, it has heightened our divisions, I think. The bonds of affection—Lincoln, this time, not Stalin—are very strained.

In recent weeks, I have thought of a book, published almost 30 years ago: *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. First appearing in 1991, it was reissued in 1992 and 1998. It was a hit with many conservatives, which was surprising, given the source: Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., that high priest of liberalism.

He was in his mid 70s when he wrote *Disuniting*. He had published his first book more than 50 years before, when he was 21. That was his senior thesis at Harvard, a study of Orestes Brownson, a 19th-century New Englander who wrote, preached, organized, etc. Schlesinger followed that up with *The Age of Jackson*, a hit in 1946.

Writing about Schlesinger in 2001, William Leuchtenburg, a fellow historian, walked down Memory Lane. "I recall one afternoon in 1946 overhearing a grizzled bookseller on Fourth Avenue saying to another, 'How do you figure this business? A book on Jackson a best-seller!'"

The Disuniting of America was a best-seller too. Schlesinger had a lot to

say, all life long, that is true. But also, he could write—which made him a best-seller. Here is a stylish, and typical, sample from *Disuniting*:

Those intrepid Europeans who had torn up their roots to brave the wild Atlantic *wanted* to forget a horrid past and to embrace a hopeful future. They *yearned* to become Americans. Their goals were escape, deliverance, assimilation.

I wish *Disuniting* could be a best-seller today, too. It is “ripped from the headlines,” as they say—the headlines of right now. It is dated only in small, trivial ways. The book is an expression of the old liberalism, supplanted by leftism and other flavors of illiberalism. It is conservative, in one sense: protective of the “American Creed,” as Schlesinger writes (with no irony and with those capital letters).

Sitting down with the book recently, I marked it up, excitedly. It is possible to mark up a book so much, you render your markings useless.

Schlesinger opens by observing that the Cold War is over and new wars have begun: not over ideology but over those old standbys: race, ethnicity, and tribe. As he proceeds, he quotes Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist who lived from 1930 to 2013. (It was he who wrote *Things Fall Apart*, whose title is borrowed from Yeats.) The greatest weakness of the Nigerians, Achebe said, is “their inability to face grave threats as one people instead of as competing religious and ethnic interests.”

For his part, and discussing America, Schlesinger warns that “the contemporary sanctification of the group threatens the old idea of a coherent society”—a society never based on race, ethnicity, or religion, but on “a common adherence to ideals of democracy and human rights.”

What Schlesinger wants to know is, “Will the center hold? Or will the melting pot give way to the Tower of Babel?” In speaking of the center, holding or not holding, Schlesinger is borrowing from the same poem as Achebe. You may remember, also, that Schlesinger wrote a book called “The Vital Center” (1949).

As for Babel, Schlesinger writes quite a bit in *Disuniting* about English and bilingualism. There have always been many languages in America, he



Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

says, as immigrants have landed, but these languages have given way to the common tongue, English—which is critical for all concerned.

On Election Day a few years ago, I looked at my ballot and saw that it was in both English and Spanish. There was a yes-no question for voters to vote on. What you saw was “Yes/Sí” and “No/No.” *Oh, come on*, I thought. *How insulted a Spanish-speaker must be to see “No/No”—and “Yes/Sí,” for that matter.*

Schlesinger is big on integration and assimilation. Unironically, he uses “melting pot,” as you may have noticed, above. Schlesinger is a defender and admirer of this pot. But he points out that melting is a two-way street. *They*, the newcomers, must want

to integrate and assimilate; but *we*, the native-born, must want those things for them, too.

This is a burning issue in France (sometimes literally). Is it that Muslims, many of them, won’t become Frenchmen? Or that Frenchmen, many of them, won’t let them? But back to America.

“For a long time,” writes Schlesinger, “the Anglo-Americans dominated American culture and politics and excluded those who arrived after them”—including people from Italy. I thought of my friend Pat Gigliotti (whose first name was originally “Pasquale,” but who became “Pat” when a teacher of his, an Irish nun, had trouble with the original).

Pat grew up in Kansas City. Certain mothers forbade their daughters to date

him because he wasn't "white." He was Italian. Later he lived in Southern California and was called an "Anglo." Pat told me, "I can't tell whether that's a promotion or a demotion."

He further pointed out that people around him were called "Latino"—yet the original "Latin lover," Rudolph Valentino, was an Italian.

About black Americans, it is hard to be so lighthearted. "We must face the shameful fact," says Schlesinger: "Historically, America has been a racist nation." In their treatment of black Americans, white Americans "betrayed" their Creed, he says.

This summer, many prominent newspapers and magazines have decided to capitalize "black," in reference to people and culture; some of them are doing the same with "white." I myself recoil

example of Irish Americans. Also, beware "history as therapy." In one of his killer lines, Schlesinger writes, "Low self-esteem is too deep a malady to be cured by hearing nice things about one's ethnic past."

Schlesinger thinks history ought to be taught warts and all—and don't get too fixated on the warts. I think of a line that Jeane J. Kirkpatrick once uttered: "Someday, Americans will have to face the truth about themselves, no matter how pleasant it is."

I had to smile—or did I more like grimace?—when reading Schlesinger on higher education: "The situation in our universities, I am confident, will soon right itself once the great silent majority of professors cry 'enough' and challenge what they know to be vogueish blather." I think Professor

As if trying to get through to dull-witted children, Schlesinger writes, "No one needs the First Amendment more than those who seek to change society. Radicals are always in the minority and minorities gain most from the protections of the Bill of Rights."

He also gives us this killer—and ungainsayable—sentence: "It is ironic that what the multiculturalists began as a joyous celebration of diversity ends as a grim crusade for conformity."

I have said that *The Disuniting of America* is ripped from today's headlines, and it is. But if Professor Schlesinger could revise it—he died in 2007—he would surely spend time on political polarization. Red states and blue states. Fox News and CNN. Everyone in his own political camp, at daggers drawn with the enemy (and not the coronavirus).

'If separatist tendencies go on unchecked,' Schlesinger writes, 'the result can only be the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life.'

from those capital letters. I think they accent apartness (a word that, in Afrikaans, is "apartheid"). I think they constitute yet another blow to *E pluribus unum*, "Out of many, one."

Also, the phrase "black culture"—or "Black culture"—is interesting. There are subcultures in America, naturally, as there are in countries all over. But it should not be forgotten that black culture is part and parcel of *American* culture, across the board. Thomas Sowell once pointed out to me that the average black family has been on these shores longer than the average white family.

The *New York Times* has embarked on its "1619 Project," which places slavery at the heart of the American founding. A historian and teacher, Arthur Schlesinger has a lot to say about the teaching of history. "History is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual," he writes. He also writes, "History is a weapon."

Beware "compensatory history," he says: the kind of history that tries to make up for neglect, oppression, and other sins. Out-groups have always been attracted to this kind of history, understandably. Schlesinger gives the

Schlesinger, 30 years later, would find himself still waiting.

In 1991, he was more worried about primary and secondary schools than about universities. The "ethnic and racial pressures" on these schools were great. "If separatist tendencies go on unchecked," he writes, "the result can only be the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life."

Christopher Columbus—more than 500 years after his death—is in the news because Americans are vandalizing, toppling, or demanding the removal of monuments to him. Schlesinger strikes me as very wise: "Let our children try to imagine the arrival of Columbus from the viewpoint of those who met him and also from the viewpoint of those who sent him."

On the subject of freedom of speech, Schlesinger is clearly uncomfortable to have allies on the right and adversaries on the left. He is a free-speech champion. And right-wingers are supposed to be the censors (as sometimes they are). But left-wingers, too, prove excellent censors. And they may find that, in altered circumstances, they are the censored rather than the censoring.

Is this worse than the ethnic, racial, and other divisions that Schlesinger takes up? There is some overlap, I think.

Above, I used the word "ungainsayable," in homage to William F. Buckley Jr., who used it with some frequency. I have never heard anyone else use it. WFB and Schlesinger were old antagonists, but the last book WFB ever read, I believe, was Schlesinger's *Journals: 1952–2000* (published posthumously). He was enthralled with those journals. There were two references to him, both of them mean, he told me—but he was wowed by the journals nonetheless.

He had a plan: to review the journals at great length—20,000 words or so—for *The New York Review of Books*, *The Atlantic*, or a comparable publication. He died before that could happen, however.

I will trust Bill on the journals, which I have not read. *Disuniting*, I have—and I find it a splendid contribution, made by the author in the twilight of his career. This is a patriotic contribution, too. You can hear in Schlesinger's book the mystic chords of American memory, which Lincoln hoped would swell again. NR



The Gospel of Jean-Jacques

Carlyle's epic account of the French Revolution resonates in our time

BY JOHN D. HAGEN, JR.

THE most famous fiasco in literary history occurred when Thomas Carlyle gave John Stuart Mill the first part of his great work *The French Revolution* to critique. Mill's maid thought the manuscript was wastepaper and threw it into the fire. The loss was total. Carlyle had no copy.

Carlyle and his formidable wife, Jane, were newly arrived in London from Scotland, with scant savings in their purse. The loss of the book, and its anticipated revenue, threatened them with ruin. Carlyle (who had just been introduced to high society, and was keeping company with grandees such as Mill and Wordsworth) manfully resolved to work as a laborer.

Mill commendably insisted upon paying for the loss. After fierce entreaties, Carlyle accepted half the sum that Mill had proposed. He set himself to rewrite the manuscript, imagining God as a stern Scots schoolmaster tearing up an assignment and saying, "No, boy! You must do better!"

The task of recomposition was staggering. It was far more difficult than rewriting a conventional history. The power of the book is in its imagery. Carlyle's work is Dantesque in its sheer

range of allusion: mythological, biblical, literary, historical—a compendium of Western culture.

Here are some representative images. The Paris working class, before the revolution, sets off fireworks on the fall of a royal minister: "gamboling merely, in awkward Brobdingnag sport, . . . yet in its huge half-vacant laugh lurks a shade of grimness." The Bastille falls, not so much by force as by the roar of the encircling crowd, "like the City of Jericho, . . . overturned by miraculous sound." After Louis XVI is dethroned, the French nation "cannot believe, though his giant bulk, covering acres, lies prostrate, bound with peg and packthread, that he will not arise again, man-devouring." Regicide and the Reign of Terror follow. The French legislature is cowed by the Jacobin radicals: "Are ye not all doomed, as in the Polyphemus Cavern: the fawningest slave of you will be but eaten last!"

The book is a gallery of portraiture. Lafayette, commanding the National Guard, is compared to Poseidon ("In all tempests, Lafayette, like some divine Sea-ruler, raises his serene head"). King Louis, well-meaning, indecisive, ineffectual, "sits there, as he has ever done, like clay on the potter's wheel; perhaps the absurdest of all pitiable and pardonable clay-figures that now circle under the Moon." Marie Antoinette "delights to succor

the poor—such poor as come picturesquely into her way,” and fatally postpones escape from Paris, since “no Queen can stir without new clothes.”

On the left, in the legislative hall, is the Mountain, an elevated space where the Jacobins sit—barren of talent, but “lava welters redhot in [its] bowels.” Its leader is Robespierre, whom Carlyle calls “the seagreen Incorruptible” because of his bilious complexion and pretensions of rectitude. Appointed a judge as a young man, he resigned to protest capital punishment. Later he sent thousands to the guillotine as leader of the dictatorial Committee of Public Safety. Revolutionaries embraced him, because “Doubt dwelt not in him, . . . his feline eyes excellent in the twilight.”

Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, master storytellers, used to carry *The French Revolution* around with them for the sheer delight of reading it. Mordant humor abounds in its pages, but it is a deadly serious book. It merits close attention today, in the smoldering aftermath of riots and the toppling of statues. It illuminates our own political and cultural crisis.

A central theme of Carlyle’s narrative is “the Gospel of Jean-Jacques”—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author of *The Social Contract* and other utopian works. Rousseau is the leading spirit of the cultural Left, in our time as in his. He voiced the great paradox of the Left—libertarian selfism in morals combined with coercive, collectivist statism in political arrangements.

Rousseau’s first writings present an anthropology that, in essence, prevails on the cultural Left today. He envisions human beings as bundles of individual desire. He is preoccupied with autonomy, “the power of willing or rather of choosing, . . . and the feeling of this power.” He identifies self-love as the predominant human impulse. But (in sharp contrast to the doctrine of original sin and to earlier secular thinkers such as Hobbes and Machiavelli) he sentimentalizes self-love. He argues that human beings are fundamentally unaggressive by nature. He teaches a feelings-based morality and argues that compassion can ensure a benign social order. He imagines a prehistoric libertarian golden age, and he aspires to utopia.

Meanwhile, he denounces existing institutions as corrupt. *The Social Contract* famously opens, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” Rousseau and the cultural Left that follows him must find their way from an autonomy-obsessed, hedonistic notion of human nature to a collectivist, coercive theory of government organized for purposes of reform. Rousseau accomplished this paradox with his theory of the General Will.

Rousseau’s concept is that, human nature being essentially benign, the impulses of the general public inevitably tend toward the common good. He grounds this notion in a sentimental deism (“The voice of the people is in fact the voice of God”). True freedom therefore requires conforming each person’s will to the General Will. It is the “real will” of each citizen. Thus, as Rousseau expressly states in *The Social Contract* (and as Robespierre despotically asserted), people can be “forced to be free.”

These concepts readily passed from Rousseau’s sentimental deism, to Hegel’s doctrine of world-historical progress, to Marx, and to progressivism today. The concepts lend themselves to a mystical exaltation of the state (and of leaders who speak on its behalf) as constituting the General Will. Such thinking contrasts with most of Anglo-American political thought, which emphasizes human corruptibility, is adamant to place restraints on power, and seeks incremental reform.

Carlyle makes this contrast a leading theme of *The French Revolution*. He repeatedly cites “the Gospel of Jean-Jacques” as having supplanted the Christian gospel and consciousness of original sin. Thus:

The Gospel of Jean-Jacques has come. . . . A Gospel of Brotherhood, not according to any of the Four old Evangelists, and calling on men to repent, and amend *each his own* wicked existence, that they might be saved; but a Gospel . . . according to a new Fifth Evangelist Jean-Jacques, calling on men to amend *each the whole world’s* wicked existence, and be saved by making the Constitution.

Rousseau’s hedonistic utopianism laid the ground for the French Revolution. Carlyle inveighs: “Fools, that expect your verdant Millennium, and nothing but Love and Abundance, brooks running wine, winds whispering music,—with the whole ground and basis of your existence champed into a mud of Sensuality; which daily growing deeper, will soon have no bottom but the Abyss!”

Thus runs the tale. Moral bankruptcy, sped by the gospel of Jean-Jacques, soon becomes financial bankruptcy. King Louis fatefully convenes the Estates General of the realm: 1,200 representatives of the Clergy, Nobility, and Commons. Plots, effervescence, and tumults follow, leading to the fall of the Bastille. The Estates declare themselves the National Assembly, and they undertake revolutionary reform.

THE gospel of Jean-Jacques guides the arc of the revolution. There is a “Night of Pentecost,” abolishing feudalism in one session of the Assembly. A constitution is devised, and the “Twelve Hundred Jean-Jacques Evangelists” disperse. Their place is taken by a legislature increasingly controlled by the Jacobins. Carlyle calls them “the Ecumenic Council and General-Assembly of the Jean-Jacques Churches,” with Robespierre as their Chief Priest.

Jacobin utopianism fails, as utopianisms all do. This naturally is seen as owing to traitors. “Tremble, ye traitors; dread a People which calls itself patient, long-suffering; but which cannot always submit to have its pocket picked, in this way,—of a Millennium!” Thus, the gospel of Jean-Jacques issues in apocalypse: the murderous rhetoric of Jean-Paul Marat, the September Massacres in the prisons, the Reign of Terror, death-tumbrels to the guillotine. Sentimental visions of utopia lead to atrocity and horror. So has it been in subsequent revolutions arising from utopianism in Russia, China, Cambodia, and other lands. So might it be in our own land if recent trajectories prevail.

The gospel of Jean-Jacques is ascendant in America today. Its libertarian strain is found in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, refining the logic of *Roe v. Wade* to justify abortion on these grounds: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” Rousseau himself abandoned his infant children to near-certain death in orphanages, and this is his legacy—human beings conceived as atomized, arbitrary bundles of desire. Rising out of that legacy are assaults on moral norms of every sort: unrestricted abortion, assisted suicide, ubiquitous pornography, marijuana lotus-eating, insistence that all norms are mere social constructions. This

paradigm largely reduces, as Carlyle says, to the maxim that “pleasure is pleasant.”

Meanwhile, the collectivist strain of Jean-Jacques’s gospel goes from strength to strength. It inspires a progressivism unburdened by any wariness of the will-to-power and human corruptibility. Utopian calls for mass mobilization (a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, free college for all, a guaranteed minimum income, social workers replacing police forces) ride on a sense of the general will. And that sense of the general will finds unprecedented expression in social media—emotive tweetings to legions of followers, instant consensus, and the merciless suppression of dissent. Our Internet postings resemble the placards flung up each morning on Paris walls. Our Twitter mobs (translated now into street mobs) resonate with a punitive rage suggestive of the French Revolution.

Other tenets of Jean-Jacques’s gospel also are ascendant today. Rousseau treated government forms as provisional and subject to abrupt change in response to the general will. Thus, he called for periodic assemblies to determine: “Does it please the sovereign [the people] to preserve the present form of government?” That protean spirit imbued the French Revolution, with its multiple constitutions, its constitution placed in abeyance, its insurrectionary Paris Commune, and its bestowing of absolute power on the Committee of Public Safety. An utterly contrary spirit informs the American Constitution, framed to endure and very difficult to amend. But behold the gospel of Jean-Jacques regnant on the cultural left today, advocating peremptory changes of form—an end to the Electoral College, an end to

The Church was derided on the eve of the revolution by Voltaire, d’Holbach, and other atheistic or vaguely deistic “philosophes.” Carlyle relates:

Philosophism knows only this, . . . that in spiritual supersensual matters no Belief is possible. . . . Shall we say then: Woe to Philosophism, that it destroyed Religion, what it called “extinguishing the abomination (*écrasez l’infâme*)”? Woe rather to those that made the Holy an abomination, and extinguishable.

Those who made the holy an abomination were clergymen of scandalous life, whom Carlyle vividly portrays. Cardinal Louis de Rohan grotesquely curried favor with Marie Antoinette, exposing her to scandal and ridicule, in the Affair of the Diamond Necklace. Bishop Talleyrand, womanizer, speculator, nationalizer of the Church, excommunicated, laicized, a diplomat for all sorts of regimes, became a watchword for worldly guile. Gobel, archbishop of Paris (Carlyle calls him “Goose Gobel”), went before the legislature, cast off his episcopal garb, and put on a red radical nightcap.

Anticlericalism flourished in this atmosphere, first with the philosophes, then among the bourgeoisie, and finally with the Paris mob. As priests were being massacred, Carlyle imagines the mob exclaiming: “Priests of Beelzebub and Moloch; of Tartuffery, Mammon and the Prussian Gallows;—which ye name Mother-Church and God!”

Analogies to our own era are obvious. The Catholic Church has been wracked with scandal, Evangelical churches disheartened,

As Rousseau’s emotionalism proliferates in the culture, as people are socialized to see themselves as self-validating vectors of desire, the groundwork of the republic trembles.

small-state equality in the Senate, attacks on the Constitution itself as an illegitimate slaveholders’ project.

A central tenet of the gospel of Jean-Jacques is that “there should be no partial society within the state.” Thus, all facets of civil society (families, churches, associations) are suspect and are subject to restraint because they impede the general will. Rousseau’s thought is deeply antithetical to the robust civil society integral to American history, as classically described by Tocqueville. But in our time, families, churches, associations, and other entities standing between individuals and the state are alarmingly in decline.

That preeminently is true of churches. Rousseau disliked the Church as an institutional rival to the state and a barrier to the general will. The clash between faith and the new French Republic, the state’s annexation of the Church, and then the calamitous state-sponsored dechristianizing of society were key thrusts of the revolution. Carlyle vividly describes them.

When the Jacobins came to power, Christianity came under brutal attack both from the government and from mobs in the streets—churches looted; clergy banished, massacred, or driven underground; the Christian Sabbath abolished and the calendar revised into ten-day weeks; heathenism, atheism, and ceremonial deism alternately regnant in the culture. These somber events bear pondering in our own dechristianizing era.

the Millennial generation mostly estranged from organized religion, the great work of John Paul II and Mother Teresa and Billy Graham largely undone. Anti-Christian bias is rife in the academy, in the media, and among all sorts of cultural elites, while worship wanes in the working class. As Carlyle observes, the Church “is in the most submissive state; quite tamed by Philosophism; in a singularly short time.”

The French Revolution is an ominous portent. But countless Christians acted with steadfastness and courage in those times. The peasants of La Vendée and the people of provincial cities rose in armed resistance to the Jacobins. Thousands of priests defied orders of banishment and persisted in their ministry, at peril to their lives. The Church emerged from the revolution chastened and humbled but resilient and capable of impressive witness (as seen in the sublime figure of the bishop in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*).

Few tasks are so vital today as renewing moral authority in the churches. As Jean-Jacques’s emotionalism proliferates in the culture, as people are socialized to see themselves as self-validating vectors of desire, the groundwork of the republic trembles. Washington famously warned, in his Farewell Address, that religion and morality are indispensable props of the Constitution. If those props fail, our trajectory easily might lie into the sort of hellish vortex that engulfed revolutionary France.

CARLYLE'S view of revolution was summed up by his biographer James Froude: He opposed it because he knew that it meant "letting the devil loose, whom it was man's duty to keep bound." A principal theme of *The French Revolution* is the monstrousness of anarchy and the fragility of social order. That theme is of urgent relevance today.

Carlyle presents a recurring image of social order as the Earth's crust, a rind above oceans of red-hot lava. The breakdown of institutions leads to hellish eruptions—the "deepest upturn of the black-burning sulphurous stratum whereon all rests and grows." Such outbursts defy constitutional governance. They are led by those who most shrilly articulate the impulses of the mob.

Carlyle expresses these dynamics with infernal imagery: Erebus, Tophet, Tartarus, the Abyss erupting into the upper air. Paris after the fall of the Bastille is a "roaring Hell-porch. . . . Seven Bastille Prisoners, borne shoulder-high; seven Heads on pikes." The Revolutionary Tribunal, guillotining thousands with summary trials, is a Jacobin "Sword of Sharpness . . . tempered in the Stygian hell-waters." A law authorizing peremptory searches of private homes sends mobs breaking into them, amid "the tumult of Satan."

Carlyle reflects on the Girondins, the centrist party that unsuccessfully tried to hold the Jacobins at bay. Their leaders mostly were attorneys, confident in their rhetorical skills. They tended to view the poor as "mounds of combustible explosive material, for blowing down Bastilles with." They were shocked when the revolution proved impossible to control: "The great gulf of Tophet . . . opened itself at the magic of your eloquent voice; and lo now, it will not close at your voice!"

There follows the bloody tale of the Jacobins in power, riding the whirlwind of anarchical insurrection. The rioting of recent weeks in America recalls Carlyle's account. We see the fragility of social order and the violent aggression unleashed when social order breaks down. We must refute the sentimental vision of human nature arising from the gospel of Jean-Jacques (especially as it issues in calls for the abolition of police). That vision has been shown false by the cruelty and carnage of every revolution to which it has given rise.

Revolution naturally tends to empower its most aggressive, ruthless elements. Dislocations and grievances cause the mob to gravitate to them. Thus Lafayette and Danton fell while Marat and Robespierre took power. Thus, in the Russian Revolution, Lenin prevailed over Kerensky. As facile Jacobinism is propagated today, it's urgent to argue that revolution devours moderates and empowers the violent.

Carlyle was "a Tory to the Radicals and a Radical to the Tories." That epigram (from *The Harvard Classics*) conveys a great strength of *The French Revolution*. The book is conservative in its anti-libertarian, anti-utopian, and anti-collectivist tone, and in its resolute insistence on the fact of original sin. It vividly argues the perennial conservative theme of caution in disturbing social arrangements. It offers a castigating rebuttal of the gospel of Jean-Jacques. Yet it dramatically appealed to men of the Left such as Mark Twain and Dickens (who modeled *A Tale of Two Cities* on "Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book").

That appeal was effective precisely because of Carlyle's ability to speak also as a radical to the Tories. Rarely has a conservative writer, skeptical of change, so harshly and vividly indicted corrupt institutions. Ponder this passage, in which he expresses the indignation seething in France upon the eve of the revolution:

O ye Hypocrisies and Speciosities, Royal mantles, Cardinal plush-coats, ye Credos, Formulas, Respectabilities, fair-painted Sepulchres full of dead men's bones,—behold, ye appear to us to be altogether a Lie. Yet our Life is not a Lie, yet our Hunger and Misery is not a Lie! Behold we lift up, one and all, our Twenty-five million right-hands; and take the Heavens, and the Earth and also the Pit of Tophet to witness, that either ye shall be abolished, or else we shall be abolished!

Carlyle could impressively rally social reformers against the wickedness perpetrated in the name of reform. That quality made him a much more effective critic of the French Revolution than were conservatives such as Edmund Burke. Carlyle had sardonic words for them:

Great Burke has raised his great voice long ago; eloquently demonstrating that the end of an Epoch has come, to all appearances the end of Civilized Time. . . . Who will say that Church, State, Throne, Altar are not in danger: that the sacred Strongbox itself, last Palladium of an effete Humanity, may not be blasphemously blown open, and its padlocks undone?

Today the sacred strongbox largely is in the hands of the cultural Left. Big business, big tech, big philanthropy, and the billionaire community mostly are devotees of the gospel of Jean-Jacques. Conservatism meanwhile has pivoted to enlist the working class. That enlistment largely has been Burkean in its appeals to patriotism and to traditional social norms. It's urgent to follow Carlyle in addressing workers' financial woes as well. As globalization, automation, and the pandemic stress blue-collar families, racial minorities, and Millennials, conservatives must offer more than platitudes about rising tides lifting all boats.

Carlyle relentlessly attacked cant (platitudes and dogmatic clichés employed to justify the status quo). He called cant "the *materia prima* of the Devil, from which all falsehoods, imbecilities, abominations body themselves." The cultural Right harbors plenty of such sclerotic platitudes today. Conspicuously, they involve the benign effect of market forces, globalization, deregulation, automation, and efficiencies of scale. Those values must be balanced with a communitarian frame of reference and with a compassionate eye. Carlyle observes:

The beginning of all Thought, worth the name, is Love; and the wise head never yet was, without first the generous heart. . . . Mammon, cries the generous heart out of all ages and countries, is the basest of known Gods, even of known Devils. . . . Generous hearts, discerning, on this hand, widespread Wretchedness, dark without and within, moistening its ounce-and-half of bread with tears; . . . cannot but ejaculate, cannot but announce: Too much, O divine Mammon; somewhat too much!—The voice of these, once announcing itself, carries *fiat* and *pereat* in it, for all things here below.

Fiat: Let it be done—earnest, measured social reform, grounded in the Constitution and in our strong civic traditions, tempered by awareness of human frailty. *Pereat*: Let it be done away with—utopian selfism on the left, and Mammonism on the right. May the message of the four evangelists prevail against the gospel of Jean-Jacques. May Jacobinism be firmly forsworn. And may the lessons and portents of the French Revolution, rendered so vividly by Carlyle, be ever remembered. NR

In Policing, Race Matters

Black men are the principal beneficiaries of policing; they also bear its highest costs

BY JAMES R. COPLAND

WE can't talk about policing in the United States without talking about race. It's personal to me. I'm white. But I'm married to a black woman, and we're the proud parents of a biracial son who, as he grows up and navigates American life, will face challenges that I never had in my own youth. He's nine years old now and only barely beginning to wrestle with questions of race and identity. Yet as he matures into adulthood, he's more likely to have encounters with police than I have been. These encounters are more likely to include some police use of force than if he were white. And that's assuming he can resist his tendency, inherited from his father, to be somewhat of a smart aleck when confronted by authority figures.

My son's greater likelihood of police encounters isn't something easily fixed by legislation. There are nevertheless current efforts, in Washington and the states, as political leaders respond to the public outcry prompted by George Floyd's inexcusable death at the knee of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin.

At the federal level, alternative bills introduced by each party emphasize the intersection of race and policing, though, as one might expect, their approaches and proposed remedies differ somewhat. The Republican bill—the Just and Unifying Solutions to Invigorate Communities Everywhere (JUSTICE) Act—would enact a federal anti-lynching law, encourage police departments to recruit more minority officers, fund police-education programs, and establish a new “Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys.” The Democrats’ bill—the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act—also includes anti-lynching, recruitment, and training provisions. In addition, it has an entire section dedicated to addressing “racial profiling,” which gives new enforcement powers to the federal Justice Department as well as providing for new “civil actions”—i.e., citizen lawsuits against police departments.

The GOP bill's more modest approach here makes sense, and the Democrats' proposed remedy is deeply flawed. Before explaining why, I want to emphasize that each bill's focus on *race* as it relates to policing is appropriate—something that may seem counterintuitive to those who, like me, think we should strive for a color-blind America, at least in terms of legal rights and remedies.

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Here's why: African-American men are the principal beneficiaries of good, proactive policing in the U.S.; but black men in America also disproportionately bear policing's cost. Black people broadly understand that. Last year Gallup surveyed African-American residents of “fragile communities” on the importance of policing; 52 percent said they “would like the police to spend more time in their area than they currently do”—a higher percentage than white respondents.

But there's a cost to that policing, too. A black female friend recently wrote to me, “Every black man that I know, regardless of class or education, has had a negative interaction with the police.” That also rings true in my experience. If you don't believe us, ask Tim Scott of South Carolina, one of two African-American men in the U.S. Senate and the JUSTICE Act's Republican sponsor. In 2016, Scott told his fellow senators, “In the course of one year, I've been stopped seven times by law enforcement. Not four, not five, not six, but seven times in one year as an elected official.”

THAT policing places unique burdens on black men doesn't mean it isn't essential. Effective, proactive policing is a principal cause of the most remarkable public-policy success in America's last three decades: the sizeable reduction in violent crime. Between 1993 and 2018, American violent crime fell from 747 crimes per 100,000 to 369, a drop of 51 percent. That's more than a million fewer instances, each year, of horrible crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault. Homicides also fell by more than half from their peak (1991) to their trough (2014): from 24,808 to 12,278. That's thousands of lives saved annually.

And most of those lives are black. It's sad but true that even though only 13 percent of Americans self-identify as black, black Americans constitute more than 52 percent of murder victims. Among males (who are 77 percent of homicide victims), that share rises to 57 percent. That staggeringly high murder-rate burden borne by black American men suggests we should be extraordinarily cautious about a pullback in the proactive policing that reduces violent crime. Recent research by Harvard scholars has shown that reduced policing intensity in the wake of federal investigations of police departments scandalized by “viral” deadly-force incidents led to substantial upticks in the commission of homicides and other violent crimes.

But if we need policing, *especially* to protect black men, we also must grapple with the fact that black men are especially burdened by proactive policing practices. Police departments that do their jobs well pay particular attention to neighborhoods with higher crime patterns—which are, as the above data imply, more heavily populated by black residents. The people who live in high-crime areas thus have more interactions with police.

Moreover, we know that most crime is within-race—black-on-black, or white-on-white—whether we're talking about murder or other violent crime. That means black men are disproportionately offenders, too, an uncomfortable fact. Yes, this uncomfortable fact may be rooted substantially in the nation's long history of slavery and race discrimination, which social scientists such as James Q. Wilson have connected to a host of cultural and family outcomes. It's likely a function of varying economic opportunities, which are themselves a function of disparate educational provision and a host of government actions (including but not limited to those intended as beneficent).



Democratic House speaker Nancy Pelosi addresses reporters after the passage of police-reform legislation in the House, June 25.

Regardless of the causes of the large gap in violent-crime commission, the takeaway is simple: When black men are disproportionately offenders, they'll disproportionately be suspects—and thus disproportionately have interactions with police. That's true to some extent regardless of neighborhood, particularly for those who work in urban business districts with ongoing crime reports that show a racial skew. If a victim identifies an offender by race, police will naturally look for suspects who match the victim identification.

That means black men are much more likely to be stopped by a police officer, statistically, based on a “false positive” identification—notwithstanding that the vast majority of black men aren't serious criminals. (All Americans are petty criminals who unknowingly commit multiple felonies a day in our modern overcriminalized world.) That's what happened in 2015 to Harvard-educated tennis pro James Blake, who was wrongly fingered by a witness as being a player in an identity-theft ring. I worked mere blocks away from where the plainclothes officer mistakenly arrested (and then released) Blake, but I was exceedingly unlikely to be misidentified in the same way for that cyber crime. My son, once he enters his teen and young-adult years, is unlikely to be so lucky, at least in a heavily populated urban setting where he's not known to local cops.

WE need to think carefully about this false-positive problem, and the fact that black men are probably going to face more police interactions as long as black men are disproportionately violent-crime victims and offenders. But that complex reality also suggests the failings in the House Democrats' approach to racial profiling. I've already mentioned the potential safety costs of the Justice Department “pattern and practice” police-oversight investigations—the Harvard researchers found that the investigations correlate with more violent crime under certain conditions. The Democrats'

bill would ramp up such investigations, predating them on very loose evidentiary findings of wrongdoing.

But that's not all. The Democratic bill would also allow private plaintiffs to sue police departments. Those lawsuits would be preposterously easy to launch. To establish “racial profiling” as the bill defines it, the plaintiffs' lawyer would merely need to show that “the routine or spontaneous investigatory activities of law enforcement agents in a jurisdiction have had a disparate impact on individuals,” based on “race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

That laundry list of characteristics—hardly limited to race—highlights a core problem with such a “disparate impact” test in this context. There's not a police department in the country that doesn't focus its “investigatory activities” more heavily on men than on women. Men commit a lot more violent crimes. As we've seen, there's a broad (if smaller) racial gap when it comes to violent-crime commission, too. By its very terms, the Democrats' police-reform bill would effectively place every police force in America under the control of social-activist plaintiffs' lawyers filing suits before unelected federal judges.

Some such judges would doubtless dismiss the lawsuits, even if plaintiffs could make a threshold case. But it will be hard for judges—trained in law, not mathematical models—to tease apart the statistical evidence and make good determinations. Moreover, lawyers filing suits will do their best to shop for favorable judges. Sympathetic judges may try to get such cases on their dockets, too. That's what former federal district judge Shira Scheindlin did, as she actively encouraged the litigation that led her to rule against the New York Police Department's controversial (and overused) stop-and-frisk proactive policing program. Her actions prompted the federal appellate court to take the extraordinary step of removing her from the case. Shortly thereafter, the new mayor, Bill de Blasio, settled with the plaintiffs, ending the litigation.

Whether through judicial decisions or through “collusive settlements” like the one reached between the New York plaintiffs and the de Blasio administration, governing police departments



Republican senators Mitch McConnell and Tim Scott discuss police-reform legislation proposed in the Senate, June 17.

by “consent decree” is fraught with peril. In their 2003 book *Democracy by Decree: What Happens When Courts Run Government*, New York Law School professors Ross Sandler and David Schoenbrod chronicle the frequent mishaps of judges using such decrees to oversee school systems, prisons, and more—experiments sometimes lasting decades. At best, it’s undemocratic for federal judges to rip authority from elected local officials and thereby allow an end run around ordinary legislative processes. At worst—in the context of policing—it will lead to more murder, rape, robbery, and assault, without any public-accountability mechanism to right the course.

That’s why the Justice in Policing Act’s racial-profiling provisions would be best left on the cutting-room floor. But that doesn’t mean a special attention to race and policing isn’t warranted. The bills’ overlapping attention to disclosure, recruitment, and training is a good place to start, as is the Republican bill’s special focus on black men and boys. One reason that police officers make more false-positive identifications than they should is that cross-racial identifications are significantly less reliable than identifications within one’s own racial group. There may be ways to train officers to become more accurate, such as practicing with photo arrays—though it’s hard to cure witness errors, as in Mr. Blake’s case. Hiring more black officers would definitionally ameliorate the problem with cross-racial identifications, too.

Beyond cutting down on false identifications, hiring more minority officers would probably also cut down on the disproportionate application of force against black men. Multiple studies have shown that, when other variables are controlled for, officers are *not* more likely to shoot black rather than white suspects. But police shootings aren’t the whole story. They’re rather rare. Other uses of force are significantly more common. And other uses of force can even, as in George Floyd’s case, turn deadly.

When we look at all uses of force and not just shootings, the evidence becomes more troubling. Even controlling for factors such as age, sex, area crime rate, and time of day, researchers

have found that police officers are 18 percent more likely to use force against black than white suspects (and 12 percent more likely to use force against Hispanic suspects). But this use-of-force gap becomes smaller, and statistically insignificant, when the police officer is black or Hispanic rather than white. This difference in applied force may be attributable to differences in officer perceptions or attitudes (including but not limited to explicit or implicit racial bias). It may also be a function of suspect behavior—for instance, if black or Hispanic suspects behave differently when confronting a white officer than they do when interacting with one in a common racial or ethnic group. Regardless, if what we’re worried about is lowering the disproportionate burdens that policing places on black men in America, recruiting more minority cops probably matters. Training programs might make a difference here, too.

Although the evidence suggests that hiring more minority cops and better training of all police officers could make a difference, it’s doubtless not going to satisfy those who want more-systemic policing overhauls—or the abolition of the police altogether. But it’s wise not to overshoot. The Democratic bill’s reliance on sweeping command-and-control efforts from the Justice Department, and even from unelected federal judges, would destroy public accountability and jeopardize hard-won public-safety gains. Black men disproportionately benefit from proactive policing, too, as all of us who care about black lives should be careful to remember.

As my son gets older, I’ll probably have to give him some version of “the talk” that black parents give their sons about dealing with police. Even if he follows the straight and narrow, he’s more likely to have police interactions than are his white peers—much like Tim Scott, James Blake, and every black male friend with whom I’ve discussed this issue. That’s going to be true no matter what Congress and state legislatures do in the coming months and years. But here’s hoping that legislators take well-considered steps that protect black men’s lives while lowering the burdens imposed by that protection.

NR

A Viktor's Mandate

Orban's premiership is the result of Hungarian democracy

BY MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY

WHEN Hungary declared a state of emergency in March to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, commentators in the West immediately spread the news that the European Union's first dictatorship had arrived. Parliament was suspended. There would never be elections again. Hungary's health-care system would collapse because its prime minister, Viktor Orban, had given the nation's money away to cronies and squandered more of it in a doomed attempt to make soccer more popular. Criticism of the government was forbidden, forevermore. Political arrests would begin. A colleague of mine at the American Enterprise Institute, Dalibor Rohac, wrote in the *Washington Post* that, absent a major pushback from Brussels and Washington, D.C., Hungary would emerge "a full-fledged dictatorship." The U.S. political analyst Liz Mair—no fool, I think—confidently predicted of Orban, "He's going to wind up putting Gypsies in permanent detention."

Of course all of this was wrong. There was no diplomatic pushback. Brussels gave a preliminary ruling that the emergency law contained no threat to democracy; it was passed constitutionally. Hungary experienced its relatively small surge of cases and deaths, but its hospital system survived, even if it's not up to Western European standards, and did just fine. Orban's rule by decree included scoring some opportunistic points: He rushed through a park renovation opposed by a mayor of the opposition party and made it so that state-issued ID cards carry the birth sex of the holder. If these are abuses, they are more mild than the attempt by California governor Gavin Newsom to make rent-control schemes permanent through emergency powers. Two Hungarians were detained by police departments for criticizing the government, suspected of breaking laws against spreading misinformation during the pandemic. In each case it was determined that they had committed no crime, and they were released. By comparison, a law against online disinformation in Angela Merkel's Germany is so broad and censorious that Russia and the Philippines cite it as a model they would imitate.

As for Gypsies going into permanent detention, that didn't happen either. And it would be curious if Orban sent someone to detain Livia Jaroka, a member of the prime minister's own party who became the second Romani ever elected to the European Parliament and the first to serve as its vice president. Quietly, the European Union has shelved all Article 7 procedures against Orban's Hungary, an admission that he has not traduced the rule of law there.

Perhaps there is something misunderstood about Hungary. It is true that in 2012, Orban's party revised Hungary's constitution, and Orban has created centralized political structures. Orban, in a widely noted speech in 2014, promised to build an "illiberal democracy" and illiberal state in Hungary. In the following year he became much more famous and infamous internationally as the face of resistance to a wave of migrants and refugees. Smarting from the first time he was ousted as prime minister in 2002, he took the opportunity after 2010 to make state media—always sycophantic to the government—more baldly propagandistic. Pro-Orban business leaders have bought up some opposition organs and made them pro-government.

But if Orban did not make himself dictator for life, as some predicted during the recent pandemic, what is he? Orban has not much used the phrase "illiberal democracy" since 2014, but what could he have meant by it? Some have alleged that he has set democracy against liberal ideas. And others that he's traducing democracy.

At *Vox*, Zack Beauchamp held that democracy was the missing piece of "illiberal democracy." He has held that Orban in 2012 had rewritten the constitution in ways that were advantageous for his party, Fidesz. True, though Beauchamp fails to mention that the party had based the previous campaign on major structural reform of the government and had won its landslide victory on it, and that the government had the lawful supermajority support to pass it. Beauchamp's conclusion that this renders elections "functionally non-competitive" is simply not true. Like so many analysts of Orbanism, Beauchamp is unwilling to discuss its Hungarian opponents.

FIDESZ was born as a radical anti-Communist movement. It banned members over age 35, to keep out those who had compromised with the system. Orban made himself famous for a televised demand for the Soviets to exit Hungary. As the movement matured into a political party, Orban led it through a broad middle of the Hungarian electorate. To their left was the socialist party, MSZP, which was stacked with ex-Communists and fell into disrepute from the economic ruin of the first decade of the new millennium. Their reign between Orban's first term and his next featured a prime minister caught on tape saying, "We have obviously been lying for the last one and a half to two years." The socialist party had turned toward the Russian-style politics of patronage-privatization. At the turn of the millennium they could be, in the words of British novelist Tibor Fischer, "about as socialist as Al Capone." Outside Hungary, it has been little noted that one of the party's leaders, Gabor Simon, was found with a false Guinea-Bissau passport, hundreds of thousands of euros in foreign accounts, and millions of Hungarian florints in accounts under the identity of his false passport.

To the right of Orban's Fidesz is the occasionally outright fascist party Jobbik. Whereas Orban's Fidesz aligned with Christian Democratic parties across Europe, including Germany's CDU and Ireland's Fine Gael, Jobbik was in league with the no-kidding goose-steppers of the British National Party and France's National Front. Some Western liberals, such as the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, are so fearful of the continuing triumph of Viktor Orban that they counseled voting

for Jobbik in the last election, though it was led by a man who had founded a far-right paramilitary.

But now, having run through the middle of them all, Orban himself is becoming the new rightward pole of Hungarian politics. The remains of Jobbik, the socialist party, and others have found that they can beat Fidesz candidates in local elections when they unite, and slowly they are beginning to do so for the next national contest. Orban has lampooned this emerging threat as “a joint march of red shirts and brown shirts.” But having failed while running on their own respective records and ideologies, they are now coming into their best position to succeed. In a two-party race, Fidesz would have to win an absolute majority in 53 districts to retain control. This is possible, but it would be no easy feat.

The clash between Orban’s Fidesz and the non-Fidesz alternative would look remarkably like the contest that now defines politics in Poland, where a conservative nationalist party, Law and Justice, occupies the “populist” pole and advocates welfare for families and natalist inducements. It faces a more socially progressive party that is more classically liberal in its economic orientation.

The attempts by Orban and his allies to create a conservative and faithful media should be deemed a hubristic failure. What the state-backed and -allied outlets produce is of a substandard quality and has none of the influence that the major online outlets that mostly oppose Orban have. The government’s attempt to stand up a patriotic media has been so aggressive that even a recent blowup at the previously anti-Orban outlet *Index* has seen Orban and his government blamed as guilty bystanders to a conflict that did not directly involve them.

The case that Hungary is a particularly unsavory actor on the world stage is often made by listing odd facts about it without context. In a recent issue of *NATIONAL REVIEW* (“Orban Plays with Fire,” August 24), Dalibor Rohac mentioned a few:

Orban has cultivated ties to both Russia and China and has acted repeatedly against U.S. interests in the region. The stories of large-scale investment projects are well known, the most prominent involving the Russian nuclear-energy monopolist, Rosatom, which was awarded a contract for the Paks nuclear power plant without an open tender. The details of the contract for 10 billion euros, financed by loans from Russia, are classified. In May 2019, Hungary struck a deal for the construction of a railway connection—with Serbia’s capital, Belgrade—worth 1.9 billion euros and built and financed by China.

If doing deals with Russia and China is evidence of serious democratic backsliding, what is Germany’s interest in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline? Or the endorsement of the South Stream pipeline project by the previous Hungarian prime minister? Or the EU’s own ongoing talks about a major investment partnership with China? It is true that Orban may not have had U.S. interests top of mind when signing these deals. Like Boris Johnson and Emmanuel Macron, Orban is elected to see to the interests of his own people.

Hungary’s tender for the railway connection received only two bidders. Taking a bid from China is no more evidence of an authoritarian turn than the United Kingdom’s initial 5G deal with Huawei. Chinese companies now regularly do infrastructure projects in the United States. China Railway



Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban

Rolling Stock Corporation has contracts in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston and is in the mix for major contracts with New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Hungary’s contracts and those mentioned above could be criticized for a variety of reasons, but there is little to distinguish one set as democratic and Hungary’s as evidence of creeping authoritarianism.

Orban’s political success is due not to authoritarian structures but to the delivery of consistent economic growth. The early post-Communist years were known for stagnation and the rude awakening that a free Hungary was not the breadbasket for Europe, as it had thought itself to be, but rather a strange dependent country where EU money passes through but doesn’t remain invested, having a final destination back in the West.

Orban’s government set a target of growing the economy at a rate 2 percent higher than the average growth of the European Union as a whole. Although nearby countries including Poland and Slovakia outpaced it recently, Hungary has consistently delivered on this promise. And even in the COVID crisis, it is poised to hit the 2 percent mark the other way, seeing its economy shrink by 13 percent against an average European collapse of 15 percent. Orban’s government has managed this while delivering a tight labor market and rising wages. The minimum wage has more than doubled during his tenure. At the beginning of Orban’s second turn as

prime minister, he promised 1 million new jobs—quite a lot for a country of 10 million people. A decade later, the count stands around 800,000. Labor participation soared from 50 to 63 percent.

That growth is aimed at halting and eventually reversing a major problem that has bedeviled Central and Eastern European nations that joined the European Union: the problem of emigration and brain drain. And these are just two parts of the larger problem that Orbán sets himself to address: the viability of the Hungarian people, their society, and the state in the 21st century.

Orbán certainly used the migration issue of 2015 to political advantage. But there was a chimerical aspect to it. The idea that Muslim migrants from Iraq and Afghanistan want to settle permanently in nations such as Hungary or Poland, known for emigration, was always fanciful, even if some Europeanists claimed to believe it. In such countries those migrants, who would have been allocated from Italy, would have to be settled somewhere. Because there are no preexisting communities for them to join, the process would be quite visible and disruptive. Not to mention highly unpopular. Any government that had tried it would have been thrown out. And the migrants themselves, after sufficient time, would likely have left anyway, making their way to the richer cities with more-established Islamic communities in Western Europe.

But Orbán used the issue, to dramatize himself as standing against the great powers in the European Union, but also to dramatize the long struggle of the Hungarian people to survive the political domination of outsiders. In his 2019 state-of-the-nation address, he connected the immigration issue to Hungary's birth dearth, a Continental phenomenon in Europe and a regional catastrophe in Central Europe. "People in the West are responding to this with immigration," he said. "They say that the shortfall should be made up by immigrants, and then the numbers will be in order. Hungarians see this in a different light. We do not need numbers, but Hungarian children."

Immigration can be politically destabilizing even in much stronger, richer nations. It can lead a democratic people to vote for Donald Trump, for instance. In Hungary the calculations are even finer. In a country with a tradition of emigration, any decrease in living standards or quality of life can spur a further exodus of the most talented, who have, in their EU passports, a right to move to richer nations.

In Hungary the fertility rate is at national-suicide levels, 1.53 children per woman. Orbán has learned that a small country cannot exercise effective sovereignty without economic growth, and economic growth is more difficult, almost impossible, with a contracting population. "It is not written in the great book of humanity that there must be Hungarians in the world. It is only written in our hearts," Orbán said in his 2019 speech, before announcing a variety of natalist measures, including one that would eliminate income tax for life for any woman who had four children.

ORBÁN'S theory is that small nations must have strong and nimble states that can intervene to protect democratic peoples from the bullying of multinational corporations and larger states. And the process of centralizing

political structures is not outside the European norm, even if American conservatives look at it with suspicion. The constitutional reforms removed some checks and balances in the Hungarian system, moving it away from an American-style system toward a more British style of parliamentary supremacy. Orbán's reforms could be compared to Margaret Thatcher's in the 1980s, which pulled powers away from local government and put them into Whitehall and its archipelago of quangos. But even in "authoritarian" Hungary, the power of the prime minister would still fall short of the kind of authority enjoyed by European leaders such as French president Emmanuel Macron.

Orbán's reforms are alleged by critics including Rohac to have strengthened the majoritarian features of Hungary's constitution. Effectively, Rohac is criticizing Hungary for being democratic. But these reforms make sense if you see an alliance of nongovernmental organizations, multinational business, and an activist judiciary as a progressive battering ram against the majority wishes of the people. In his attack on Orbán as antidemocratic, Beauchamp concluded by noting that Orbán's techniques were, with "some nouns changed," not so different from those of Republicans. This tends to emphasize that the objection to Orbán has to do not with legal niceties but with his political success.

In the end, we find in Orbán neither an infallible hero for the Right internationally nor the dictator feared by liberal democrats. Orbán stands in the tradition of capable and canny European nationalist and conservative leaders, who include Ireland's Eamon de Valera and France's Charles de Gaulle. Each of these men made his career, as a younger man, standing against foreign government. And each spent his time in elected leadership annoying the Europeanists by striking political deals better than their nations were held to deserve. Each presented himself as indomitable, even unconquerable, when held aloft by popular opinion in his nation.

De Gaulle was eventually succeeded in democratic contests. And one day Orbán will be too.

Orbán has mostly retired the term "illiberal democracy." But there may be a meaning in it. Orbán was articulating not an authoritarian turn but an anti-ideological one. Ryszard Legutko, the Polish philosopher, MEP, and member of Law and Justice, is, like Orbán, a veteran of the resistance to Communism and has written a book, *The Demon in Democracy*, that may help us understand this uniquely Central European and post-Communist politics. In that book Legutko describes how the veterans of anti-Communism recognize something that Westerners don't see as readily. The partisans of liberal democracy often have the same political eschatology as Communists, believing that the democratic process and the power of markets will dissolve the supposedly irrational attachments to nation-states, their ethnicities, and their religions, leaving the rights-bearing individual not just healthier and wealthier but ultimately liberated from prejudice and superstition.

Orbán has instead vowed that Hungary's language and culture ought to survive the 21st century and prosper. This is a tricky task, and it has made Orbán more flexible than most conservatives, and more intransigent than most democrats. With memories of 1956, and caution against the corruption of power, conservatives should hope his task is a success. **NR**

Going Postal

THE latest thing to experience Sudden-Polarization Syndrome is the Post Office, because Trump wants to weld the boxes shut to keep people from voting by mail, or something. Young resisters are flocking to the USPS's defense, as if it's the sclerotic-institutional version of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

I too love my post office, a little embassy from 1962. Cheerful staff, but it's a dumpy and careworn place. There is a TV set in the corner by the ceiling, like they had in bars in the '50s. It plays upbeat videos about all the things you can do at the post office, and exciting new stamps coming up. (I like to buy the "forever" stamps, which at least are honest about how long it will take the letter to arrive.) The TV has a VHS recorder attached, which was up to date in the Clinton years but now makes you wonder if they throw the sacks of mail in a stagecoach and crack a whip. HEE-ya!

Nevertheless, it's an invaluable part of our society, right? Eh. Nothing interesting arrives in my mailbox anymore. Every day the carrier has to walk up a long flight of stairs while my dog expresses murderous rage, all so the carrier can deliver one (1) piece of mail. Yesterday it was an offer from a cremation society. The day before, a letter from a realtor wanting to buy my house. The day before that, something from the university wanting to know if they were in our will. I hate to look out the window when I hear the mailbox clank shut lest I see the delivery person with a scythe over his shoulder instead of a pouch.

Nevertheless, it's the key to our democracy's survival! We have to vote by mail because going to the polling place during a pandemic is like crossing a croc-filled moat. Really? Here's what happened the last time I voted in the local primary.

I was handed a pen and assured it had been disinfected. Good, because in the general election some distraught people may see Trump's name on the ballot and stab their eyes out with the pen, thus contracting COVID.

Then I walked to a table where the voter-registration logs were kept. An X made of blue tape on the floor six feet from the table indicated where I should stand, lest I suddenly explode like a spore pod and cast germs everywhere. (Studies show that if you do explode from COVID, the germs go only five feet, eleven inches, then drop to the ground and die on impact.)

"Do I flip you my ID from here, like Oddjob?" I said, because people who vote in the middle of the afternoon are old enough to get 1964 James Bond-movie references.

**The Post Office
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Constitution, and
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it completely the
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its way out of the
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in anguish.**

"We don't need your ID," said the clerk. Ah. Right. All they needed was my name, and then they asked my address, like the Sphinx posing a real stumper to Oedipus. If name and address matched, I was me. *Foolproof*, that.

A piece of paper was printed out, and I leaned over to sign it. Everyone at the table reared back, because we now instinctively treat everyone as if they have buzzard-melting halitosis. I gave the piece of paper to someone at another table, and he gave me the ballot with his bare hand. I was tempted to lick the ballot, then fall on the floor complaining of a Lew Grade Fever.

"Don't you mean low-grade?"

"No, I mean Lew Grade, the British media mogul. Google it. A Lew Grade Fever is a persistent yearning to see *Raise the Titanic*, which he produced. It's not a good movie but I'm a big *Titanic* fan, so."

"Should we call the ambulance?"

"Oh, I doubt they have a copy. But if they do, and it's VHS, I'll meet them at the post office."

After I filled out the ballot, I walked across the empty gym to insert it into the scanner. The ballot was rejected, perhaps because the scanner could not believe I didn't vote for the person everyone else in my neighborhood voted for.

"Try this machine," said a volunteer.

"Is that the one that counts your vote but doesn't report it, so if they need more in a close race they can turn up unreported ballots? Ha, ha! Just kidding." It ate my ballot and I gave him my pen, which went into a bucket of bleach. Outside I was hosed down with Lysol and my clothes were set on fire, just to be safe.

The turnout for the primary was quite high, so a lot of people were able to vote in the accustomed manner. No one's saying that the elderly and infirm should be shoved into community centers and forced to stand in line with goopy-nosed people who have a 102 fever. Yes, some can vote by mail. But there are people who are not immunocompromised and are just afraid to leave the house.

Also, going to vote, like, in *person*, with pens and stuff, is *work*. Voting by mail is easy! Except then you have to find a "stamp," whatever those are, and you have to find one of those boxes, and really, who has the time? Is there, like, Uber for voting? Because that would be great. You call up the app, someone comes by, gets your vote, and mails it.

Anyway, the Post Office isn't going away, because it's in the Constitution, and if you don't fund it completely the skeleton of Ben Franklin claws its way out of the dirt and cries in anguish. Then he votes "D.," because he's dead. **NR**



The Long View

BY ROB LONG

TRANSCRIPT:
RACHEL MADDOW LIVE
21 April 2021
00:21:45

[UNCORRECTED AND NOT FOR PUBLICATION]

Page 2:

RACHEL MADDOW: Madam President, what do you think when you see those pictures?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Well, you know, obviously, it's a very moving sight. We haven't had a president die in office since JFK, and you know, Rachel, in many ways I feel that President Biden was a fitting heir to that legacy.

RACHEL MADDOW: And here are some photos of your swearing in, any thoughts right now?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Of course it's an awesome moment, the history—and I'm very much aware as the first, not only female but also African-American president and also Jamaican and South Asian president—

RACHEL MADDOW: A lot of firsts!

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: So true!

RACHEL MADDOW: Do we know yet for sure how President Biden died?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Rachel, you know, that's a mystery at this time and I know that there is a medical investigation going on right now, which is proper, and I'm sure there will be a report at the right time. To be honest, I'm just right now trying to get my arms around the job and of course keeping connected to the current administration, talking to Secretary of the Treasury Elizabeth Warren, that sort of thing.

RACHEL MADDOW: But we're sure it wasn't COVID-19?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Amazingly, it wasn't. As you recall, the president came down with COVID-19 a few days, really, after his inauguration—

RACHEL MADDOW: There was speculation at the time that in fact you were the one who infected him, and—

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Well that was just so silly!

RACHEL MADDOW: I guess people reacted to seeing you that day, without a mask, and you sneezed on him several times and then touched his face a great deal.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Rachel, I'm not going to waste my time discussing absurd conspiracy theories. Joe Biden was a wonderful mentor and partner and in robust health, and did he get COVID-19? Yes he did. Did he get it from me? Impossible to say. Did he recover after a couple of days, really, on a respirator? He most certainly did.

RACHEL MADDOW: Of course, I get that. It's just that after that he took that spill in the White House and it really looked like—

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Rachel, we've been through this and through this. Honestly, I don't know why we're going over this again. As everyone now knows, the floors were slippery, having been polished recently, and I lost my footing and was trying to grab for the banister and inadvertently, in the confusion, grabbed onto the president—

RACHEL MADDOW: And pushed him down the stairs?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: He fell down the stairs. I didn't push him. Rachel, this is really Fox News kind of stuff, I'm surprised at you.

RACHEL MADDOW: Madam President, it's just that people are a little confused about the past very unlucky months for the president—

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Former president. I'm the president. He's the former president. The former, late president.

RACHEL MADDOW: But just to wrap this area up, there was the COVID and then the tumble down the stairs and then, food poisoning?

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Well, yes, and to be honest I really do feel bad about this one because as everyone knows I was the one who poured

the coffee and so I guess I handed him the one with the, I keep forgetting what the substance was called—

RACHEL MADDOW: VX.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Right, right. VX. Which is apparently something that the Russians use, so I'll be investigating that of course, and I've directed Attorney General Klobuchar to look into it as soon as possible. But the real point is, President Joe Biden was made of some pretty strong stuff, believe me. He got dosed with VX and he bounced right back.

RACHEL MADDOW: He was hospitalized, though. And was in a coma for a day.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Yes, I know that, Rachel. I was acting president at the time, which was a great honor, of course, as I was the first black and female acting president of African and West Indian and South Asian descent.

RACHEL MADDOW: And he hadn't really recovered fully from the COVID-19, which he got, some say, from you.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: No he hadn't.

RACHEL MADDOW: Or the fall down the stairs, also because of you.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: I really resent this line of—

RACHEL MADDOW: And then the poison in the coffee cup, which you poured.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Rachel, you're making me angry. You do not want to do that, girl.

RACHEL MADDOW: I'm just trying to understand.

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Understand what? Look, I loved the guy but he was elderly and accident-prone and the voters knew that. Can we please talk about the issues?

RACHEL MADDOW: One last question if I may on this. Do we, as yet, have any idea how the toaster got into the bathroom? Or how it tumbled into the president's—

PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Former! Late!

Continued on page 3.

Good Fences, Bad Neighbor

ANDREW STUTTAFORD



The Shadow in the East: Vladimir Putin and the New Baltic Front, by Aliide Naylor
(I. B. Tauris, 256 pp., \$27)

IN the aftermath of Russia's takeover of Crimea, there were widespread fears that the Baltic states, notwithstanding their membership in NATO, might be next. As Aliide Naylor relates in *The Shadow in the East*, those fears have since eased, but extreme vulnerability (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia could be overrun in days) and constant low- and not-so-low-level Russian aggression against the Baltic trio continue to keep nerves on edge.

Russia's assault on Ukraine has forced NATO to relearn the power of symbolism. Several thousand troops from other NATO allies are now present in the Baltic states at any time, a reminder that the guarantee contained in Article 5 of the NATO treaty (an attack on one NATO country is to be treated as an attack on all) also extends to the alliance's northeastern marches. Their numbers are tiny: no more, Naylor explains, than "a tripwire, unable to resist Russia's military might

in the event of a full-scale invasion—but thus far they have served as an effective deterrent."

Donald Trump has, as Naylor recalls, at times appeared distinctly unenthused by NATO, yet he ought to appreciate how cost-effective deterrence is. But deterrence works only if it is credible. The Kremlin must be convinced that the risk of retaliation from NATO should Russia move on the Baltic states is too high to be worth it. Boots on the ground are an emphatic supplement to words in a treaty. In a development after the publication of this book, the U.S. will, on Trump's instructions, withdraw roughly one-third of the 36,000 U.S. troops now deployed in Germany. Some will be shifted to Poland, others to Italy and Belgium, but the comparative calm seen in the Baltic region in recent years suggests that it would make sense, strategically and financially, to send some there too rather than (as is currently planned) bringing them all home to the U.S.

In an era of hybrid war, though, the danger from Russia is not confined to a conventional invasion. Subversion has been elevated into a dark science, and although, Naylor writes, the Baltic states have "specific sets of domestic issues that can be exploited" (a reference to Latvia's and Estonia's large Russian-speaking minorities), they have also "been a 'testing ground' of sorts for methods that are later deployed further afield." Those methods include "information war," something of particular concern in the Baltics. While, as Naylor points out, the Baltics' Russian-speakers are a less monolithic group than is often assumed, too many of them live in a separate "information space," getting much of their "news" directly from the ancestral homeland.

Then there are cyberattacks, a potentially devastating form of aggression. In 2007, as Naylor discusses, Estonia was subjected to the first mass Russian cyberattack. And the other Baltics have not been left unscathed either. Naylor notes that Article 5 refers only to "armed" attack, but she should have added that the alliance has recognized

since 2014 that, under certain circumstances, the alliance's collective self-defense provisions could be invoked after a sufficiently serious cyberattack, something she claims that NATO began to examine only in 2018. Then again, quite what that could mean in practice is—as Naylor highlights—hard to say. As a result, its deterrence value is, unfortunately, minimal. And this is not a lone gray area.

Naylor writes about how Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have to "contend with being consistently defined as 'post-Soviet'—seen solely through the prism of their former occupying force," something made even more irritating for them by the immense progress they have made since regaining their independence. But half a century of occupation cannot be wished away. Naylor's fairly brief look at that period is mainly focused on its horrifying opening act in the 1940s, when the Baltic states were overrun first by the Soviets, then by the Germans, and then again by the Soviets. Naylor is right that the narrative of Baltic victimhood has sometimes been allowed—even today—to obscure the ugly and inexcusable local participation in the Holocaust. She has, however, little to say about the terrible choices faced by other citizens of these three small nations caught between two totalitarian colossi and not infrequently forced to pick sides. She largely passes over the decades after the Baltics had seemingly been absorbed within the Soviet Union for good—a mistake, given how those times still resonate—but notes how "the occupation era is 'othered' and remains an alien presence inside the countries even as it is recalled as part of their history." Yes, but that's nothing new: Visiting Estonia almost exactly two years after it broke free from the USSR, I was struck by how often ethnic Estonians spoke of wanting the "normal" life they had been denied in the Soviet years. The loss of independence, large-scale Russian immigration, and the imposition of a bizarre economic system manufactured a reality that they had had to deal with but had never accepted as theirs.

Naturally, Naylor casts her gaze eastwards, skillfully sketching attitudes within Russia as she does so. But I was surprised to read that Russians hung on to “their fiercely communist beliefs” into the 1990s. (In truth, many, especially pensioners, driven by nostalgia and, mainly, anxiety about atrophied social benefits, mourned the lost stability of the Brezhnev years; Bolsheviks they were not.) Naylor is correct, though, that the chaos of that decade is a key element in Putin’s support. So far as Russian sentiment about the Baltics is concerned, she is right to cite the resentment felt by many Russians as NATO expanded towards their borders, but that was, it ought to be said, also one expression—among many—of a still persistent sense of imperial entitlement. Russia should, apparently, have a veto over the alliances made by the peoples it once ruled.

Naylor has traveled extensively in the Baltic region but has also worked and studied in Russia, experience that adds a valuable perspective to the book as well as some unexpected insights. For instance, she maintains that Russia applies “feminizing language to the Baltics” or, more generally, the West, depicting criticism of Russia as overly emotional or hysterical or, alternatively, infantile, in order to depict “the western world [as] a child, a girl, someone to be easily overpowered and intimidated by displays of machismo.”

The Shadow of the East may revolve around the Baltics’ relationship with Russia, but the book is not only about that. While it is neither a history of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia nor a comprehensive guide to the Baltics today, there are glances, at least, at contemporary life in these countries, chosen, I suspect, in part because of their appeal to the author, ranging from the hipsters of Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius to little delivery robots trundling along Estonian streets to song, folk culture, and even a spot of paganism.

If I had to guess (it is not a stretch), Naylor’s politics tend towards the “progressive,” and that might explain her stance when it comes to the ethnic politics of the region. She appears uneasy, for example, over restrictive legislation governing the status of the Russian language, legislation understandable in countries where history,

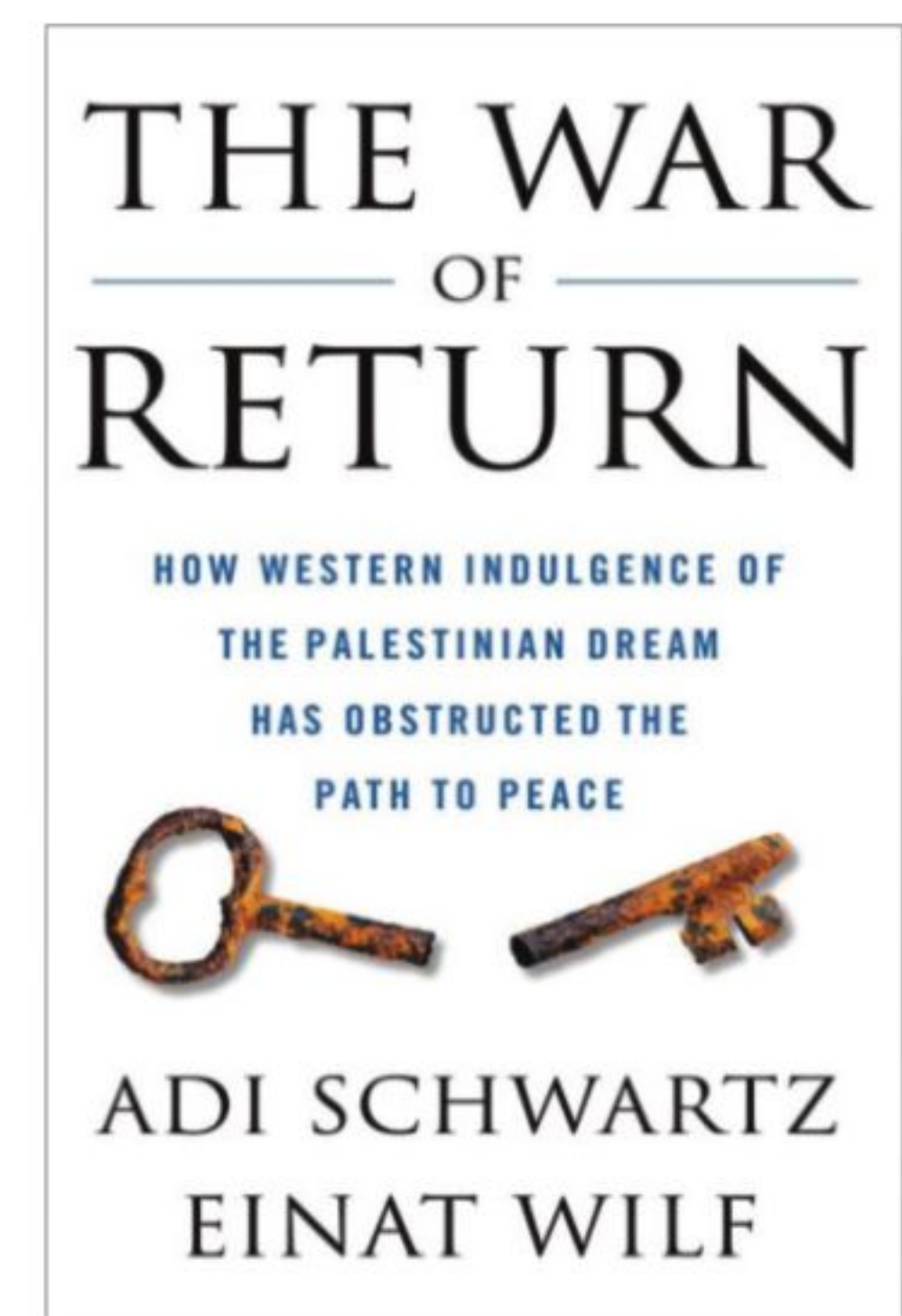
size, and, in a way, geography make state-sanctioned bilingualism unacceptable. And then, although Naylor does not downplay the atrocities of early Soviet rule (far from it), it was jolting to read that native Estonians’ share of their own country’s population had “dwindled” from “97.3 percent in 1945 to 61.5 percent” in 1989, an oddly peaceful, inadequate verb. There is, for the most part, only indirect discussion in *The Shadow of the East* of the neocolonial immigration policy that led to an influx of (primarily) Russians into Estonia (and, for that matter, Latvia) on a scale that has permanently transformed their ethnic composition.

Equally, while EU membership—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia all joined in 2004—has been an enormous boon to the Baltic states, Naylor’s evident distaste for Brexit might be the reason she doesn’t touch on the challenge that the centripetal forces set in motion by a single market and a shared currency might eventually represent to the prosperity of the union’s Baltic periphery. More than that, the opportunity to work elsewhere in the EU (something to which Naylor alludes) is an essential freedom but a possibly existential threat to three small countries with a giant, belligerent neighbor and—in Latvia and Estonia—a delicate ethnic balance. All three saw significant population declines in the 1990s (partly owing to an outflow of Russians), and in Latvia and Lithuania this trend has continued (Estonia benefits from the fact that its linguistic, cultural, and geographic proximity to Finland makes it easy to commute there rather than emigrate). Since joining the EU, Lithuania’s and Latvia’s populations have each fallen by over 15 percent (the aftereffects of the collapse in the birth rate—now partly reversed—after independence will not have helped). Around 1.2 million ethnic Latvians live in Latvia, fewer than a million ethnic Estonians in Estonia. In 1989, Lennart Meri, a future president of Estonia, spoke of the “biological and social terror of belonging to a people that is dying out.” Naylor concludes that “the future for the Baltics can be bright,” and so it can. But for all the extraordinary strides that the Baltic states have made since shaking off the USSR, I doubt that that terror has gone.

NR

The Blocked Path to Peace

MICHAEL M. ROSEN



The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace, by Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf
(All Points Books, 304 pp., \$28.99)

EARLIER this month, Israel achieved a stunning diplomatic breakthrough, agreeing to normalize relations with the United Arab Emirates in exchange for cashing in its plans to extend sovereignty to certain portions of the West Bank, which it conquered in a defensive war 53 years ago. The UAE accord undermined the claims by European Union factotums and Obama-administration foreign-policy veterans alike that Israel could attain regional peace only through territorial sacrifice dictated by the Israeli–Palestinian diplomatic process.

That process, however, has been on life support for more than a decade, and in *The War of Return*, Einat Wilf’s incisive and bracing revisionist look at the conflict, with journalist Adi Schwartz, the real reason quickly becomes apparent. An ardent exponent of the center-left philosophy of Israel’s Labor Party, and an adviser to former prime minister Shimon Peres before winning election to Israel’s parliament in 2010, the Harvard-educated Wilf reveals a fundamental change of heart, a more-in-sorrow-than-

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in-anger transition from hopefulness to resignation that largely tracks that of Israeli society as a whole.

The key to understanding the conflict, Schwartz and Wilf argue, lies in the most intractable of disputed issues: the refugees. “The Palestinian conception of themselves as ‘refugees from Palestine,’” they write, “and their demand to exercise a so-called right of return, reflect the Palestinians’ most profound beliefs about their relationship with the land and their willingness or lack thereof to share any part of it with Jews.”

Worse, the international community has exacerbated the crisis, as “UN structural support and Western financial support for these Palestinian beliefs has led to the creation of a permanent and ever-growing population of Palestinian refugees, and what is by now a nearly insurmountable obstacle to peace.” Indeed, allowing the migration into Israel of the millions of people currently defined as Palestinian refugees would overwhelm and ultimately destroy the Jewish state.

Schwartz and Wilf begin by exploring the origins of the Palestinian refugees: Israel’s 1947–49 war of independence. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled their homes, either at the urging of invading armies from neighboring Arab countries, in apprehension of what might befall them under Jewish rule, or in general dread at the prospect of a bloody conflict. In addition, thousands of Arabs—the exact numbers are hotly disputed—were indeed forcibly expelled from their homes by Israeli soldiers. But these expulsions resulted more from tactical military decisions than from strategic design.

Such mid-century dislocations were more the norm than the exception. Millions of ethnic Germans were unceremoniously expelled from Central Europe in the wake of World War II. During the partition of India and Pakistan, some 14 million fled and 2 million perished. And nearly 1 million Jews faced expulsion from their homes in Arab countries following the outbreak of Israel’s war of independence, as millennia-old Jewish communities in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere were liquidated by vengeful Arab regimes. As Schwartz and Wilf put it, “the Palestinian defeat exacted a human toll, but it was

neither necessary nor exceptional.” It could have been avoided, they note, “had the Arabs of Palestine accepted the UN proposal for partition of the land with the Jews of Palestine.”

And yet, in the wake of the 1948 war, all Middle Eastern regimes refused to negotiate resettlement of the refugees with the Jewish state. “As soon as we recognize the existence of Israel,” Azzam Pasha, the head of the Arab League, told Israeli diplomat Abba Eban in 1949, “we shall have admitted by this very act that we are vanquished.”

Others were even less inclined toward a peaceful resolution. “They have turned a matter of jihad into a problem of refugees,” said Emil Ghury, a member of the Arab Higher Committee. “We are concerned to turn the question into a question of jihad, to harvest hatred of the Jews in the heart of every Arab.”

It was the machinations of a Swedish diplomat, though, that vaulted the Palestinian refugees onto the global stage. In September 1948, Count Folke Bernadotte, assigned by the U.N. Security Council to mediate the Arab–Israeli conflict, asserted for the first time “the right of the refugees to return to their homes at the earliest practical date.” This contrived right—never before or since applied to any other refugee population—found its way into U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194, which Arab governments thenceforward wielded as a cudgel against the Jewish state.

Initially, Israel proved receptive to the plan, offering to welcome 100,000 Arab refugees within its borders or to assert sovereignty over the Egyptian-held Gaza Strip and absorb its 170,000-strong population, yet the Arab world roundly rejected both proposals.

Instead, Arab leaders in the 1950s successfully lobbied the international community to establish the U.N. Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), an entire United Nations agency with a perpetually renewable mandate dedicated singly to the cause of Palestinian refugees. In contrast, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was charged with assisting and resettling all the other tens of millions of refugees throughout the world. The Arab League deliberately chose to exclude Palestinians from the customary treatment afforded refugees, in order to deploy them as a strategic asset against Israel. The same was true of regimes in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, which chose *not* to integrate their Palestinian refugees into mainstream economic, social, and cultural life and instead to confine them for nearly three-quarters of a century in cramped, squalid refugee camps.

Schwartz and Wilf demonstrate how the Arab world coopted the UNRWA and warped its objectives from resettling and rehabilitating Palestinian refugees to preserving the status quo, thwarting the best efforts of the Eisenhower

THIS TOO

I don’t want to read.
I just want to lie here
and look out the window.

From blue clouds
in soft haze over Jerusalem,
thoughts rise.

Yesterday morning when I opened the shutter
the city was knee-deep
in a white lake of mist.

There’s bright sun
in spangles
on my green sleeve.

—P. DAVID HORNIK

administration. In turn, the UNRWA developed its own educational and cultural apparatuses, which indoctrinated refugee children against the Jewish state, thereby becoming “one of the most important Palestinian national-consciousness-building instruments.” UNRWA governance simultaneously enfeebled Palestinian sovereignty and emboldened Palestinian extremism. The U.N.’s own oversight committee found that UNRWA textbooks consistently depicted Jews as the “irreconcilable enemy” of Muslims and disparaged them as “liars,” “cheats,” “money-lenders,” and “idiots”; perhaps worse, UNRWA fostered among Palestinian children “an atmosphere of despair, frustration and antagonism.”

This hatred, coupled with an unyielding expectation of return, not only fueled the repeated terror attacks against Israeli civilians emanating from the refugee camps but also helped determine the negotiating positions the Palestinians would adopt when the peace process began in earnest in the 1990s. As Schwartz and Wilf write, “the Israelis were genuinely convinced that the Palestinians were using the right of return as a bargaining chip and would ultimately relinquish this demand.” The conflict, they persuaded themselves, could be reduced to a territorial disagreement that, however prickly, was far from fatal; the refugees and their descendants could easily resettle in a Palestinian state situated on the bulk of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Insisting on a right of return couldn’t possibly be worth forgoing a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

But, in fact, for the Palestinians, the right of return was always central. Relinquishing the claim to resettle in Israel proper entailed recognizing Israel as a Jewish state, and no Palestinian leader of any stature has ever been prepared to do so, as Schwartz and Wilf’s survey of a variety of primary sources reveals. For instance, a leaked Palestinian communiqué written shortly after the collapse of the failed Camp David final-status peace talks in 2000 indicated that Palestinian negotiators had no intention of “abandoning their fundamental right to return to their home,” while another memo asserted a right to return to “their chosen destination (Israel, Palestine, third coun-

tries).” History would repeat itself on several subsequent occasions, as Palestinian leaders walked away, on right-of-return grounds, from compromises that would have fully satisfied their territorial demands.

This revelation that Palestinian intransigence stems from the right of return greatly displeased supporters of the peace process on the Israeli left such as Schwartz and Wilf, but the sobering truth has clarified the issue for the Israeli public, which in recent years has grown increasingly bearish on the prospect of peace.

What can be done, then, to spur change? “Effective peacemaking,” they write, “would require a complete reversal of the reigning paradigms that have governed negotiations in past decades.” The international community must end its incessant practice of “West-splaining”—insisting, contrary to all evidence, that all the Palestinians *really* want is sovereign territory side by side with Israel and an end to Israeli military control over West Bank population centers. Instead, the U.N. Security Council should enact a resolution declaring that Palestinian demands to return to Israel proper have “no legal validity” and are a “flagrant violation under international law.”

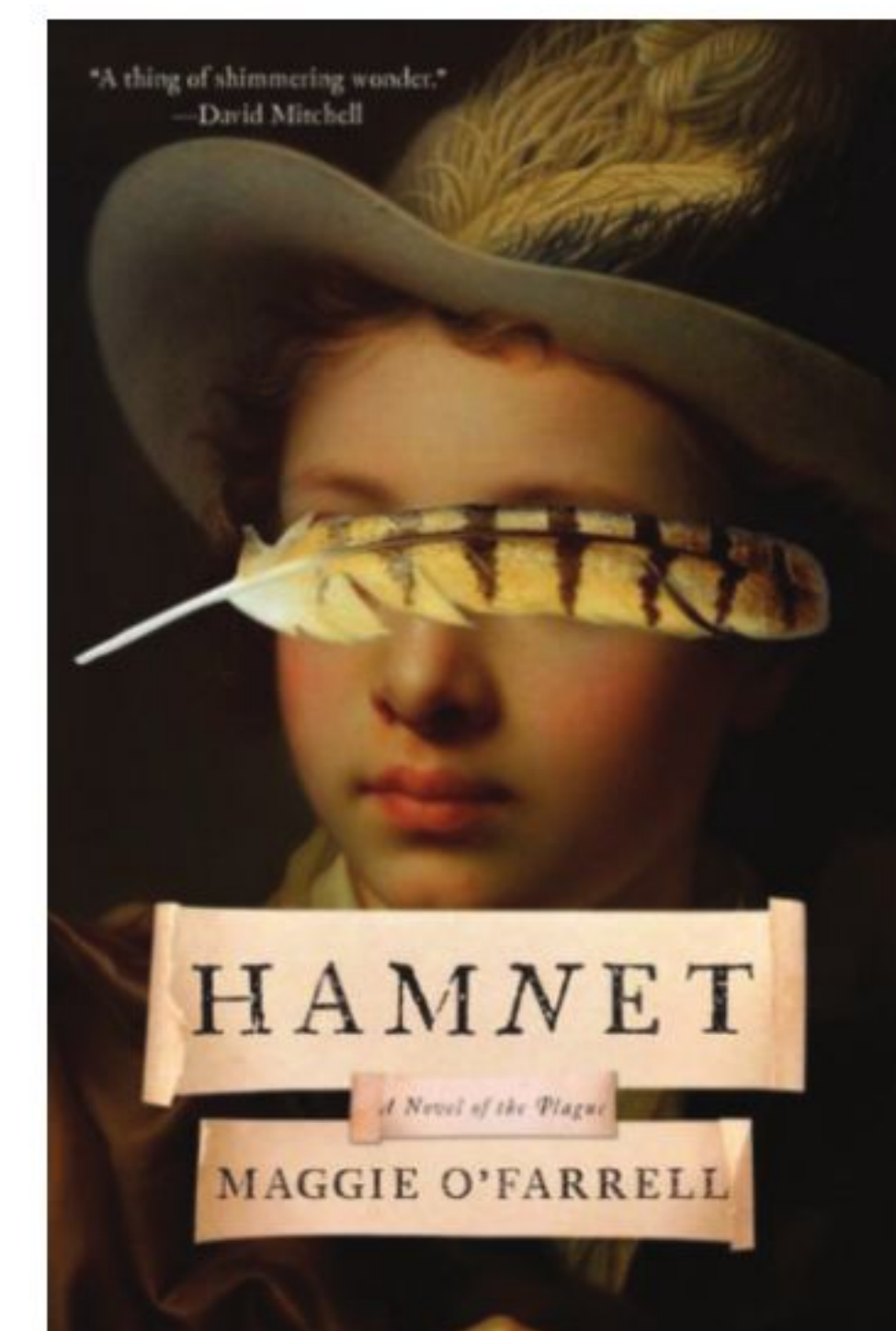
Schwartz and Wilf also call for reforming UNRWA’s “inflationary” definition of Palestinian refugees to align with the commonly understood one, which would not include millions of the descendants of refugees, let alone citizens of other states.

Moreover, they urge unwinding the UNRWA’s corrupt mandate altogether by building on former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley’s 2018 decision to defund the organization. That would entail consolidating its operations in Gaza and the West Bank into those of the Palestinian Authority, dismantling its outposts in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, and transferring any remaining responsibilities to the UNHCR.

While forging an international coalition empowered to take such steps would require persistence and imagination, Schwartz and Wilf capably demonstrate its urgent necessity. “The road to peace,” they conclude, “can only be cleared if the Palestinians understand that their claims over the whole of Palestine from the river to the sea have no international support.” **NR**

What’s in a Name?

DIANE SCHARPER



Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague, by Maggie O'Farrell (Knopf, 320 pp., \$26.95)

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born in 1564 during one of several outbreaks of the bubonic plague that killed about a quarter of the population of Stratford-upon-Avon, his hometown. Supposedly, he survived because his parents locked themselves in their house. But three of Shakespeare’s sisters and his brother are thought to have been among the plague victims.

When he was working in London, from about 1585 to 1612, additional outbreaks occurred. The Globe Theatre and other playhouses were forced to close in order to slow the spread of the disease. Many people went broke. Players, theatergoers, and hundreds of ordinary citizens died during these outbreaks, which killed more than a fifth of Londoners. These outbreaks also killed citizens of Stratford, including, many believe, Shakespeare’s eleven-year-old son, Hamnet, who died in 1596.

His death is the focal point of Maggie O’Farrell’s evocative new novel, which re-creates about 16 years in Shakespeare’s life. The narrative covers everything from his first meeting with Agnes (a.k.a. Anne) Hathaway, his

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wife—who is the novel’s protagonist—to the production of the play *Hamlet*, about four or five years after Hamnet’s demise.

O’Farrell is an award-winning Irish author of seven previous novels and, most recently, a memoir, *I Am, I Am, I Am*, which recounts 17 near-death incidents that happened to her or her daughter. It was originally written as life-affirming journal entries to give a message of hope to her daughter, whose medical condition makes her especially vulnerable.

Although *Hamnet* deals with the death of a child and its effects on his parents, the book is also life-affirming as it suggests ways art can transcend misfortune. O’Farrell says she wrote it only after her own son celebrated his eleventh birthday, because she is superstitious.

As I read the novel, it occurred to me that perhaps Shakespeare too was superstitious. There are only a few peripheral mentions of the plague in his plays, such as in *Romeo and Juliet* when Friar John is sent to deliver a crucial message but is unable to do so because

O’Farrell frequently alludes to characters and scenes found in Shakespeare’s other plays. Agnes’s grudging stepmother, Joan, is reminiscent of the “greasy Joan” referred to in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Agnes’s grief and her husband’s bring to mind the scene in which King Lear mourns the loss of his daughter Cordelia. Bats, owls, and ghosts traverse the streets of Stratford at night.

The first chapter spotlights a free-spirited boy running through the hallway and down the stairs. We soon learn that this is Hamnet. If his gestures remind one of Puck, the trickster sprite in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that’s because he too is a trickster, as we will later understand.

O’Farrell employs the techniques of drama and poetry, with vivid language as well as appeals to the five senses. Agnes is an herbalist, and O’Farrell includes details regarding the appearance, history, and odor of numerous plants. At times, the novel feels like a prose poem but also somewhat slow and

When she learns that her husband has written a play titled “Hamlet,” she travels to London, planning to berate him for diminishing the importance of their son’s tragic death. But as the novel ends, she sees her husband acting in the play and realizes what he’s actually done.

O’Farrell leaves many details ambiguous. When Agnes is first introduced she looks to be a boy, recalling Shakespeare’s frequent use of mistaken identity, a device that plays a large role in the novel. The twins, Hamnet and Judith, often trick the family into thinking one is the other, the same trick Hamnet ultimately uses to save Judith. Even the cover image of a boy with a quill across his face adds to the ambiguity. Is this the child, Hamnet? Or is it the son that Agnes’s husband re-created through his quill pen?

The novel is teasingly dedicated to Will, which happens to be the name of O’Farrell’s husband, but is also the name of Hamnet’s father, though he is never named in O’Farrell’s story. He is identified only by his work, actions,

Did Shakespeare name one of his greatest tragedies after his son? Was the name ‘Hamlet’ just a coincidence?

of quarantine restrictions. But other than such small instances, the plague seems strangely absent from the Bard’s work. Some critics have wondered about this, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt, whom O’Farrell quotes in an epigraph. *Hamnet* depicts the plague as significantly affecting Shakespeare and his career.

The scant available records show that Shakespeare and his wife lived in Stratford-upon-Avon, on Henley Street, in the 1580s with their three children in a small addition to Shakespeare’s parents’ home. Their oldest child, Susanna, was born six months after they married and was baptized on May 26, 1583. They also had twins, Judith and Hamnet, who were baptized on February 2, 1585, and were named after the town’s baker and his wife. O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* begins in 1596, then flashes back and forth—imaginatively building on those few known facts.

overwritten. Yet she keeps the narrative moving through dramatic irony, use of the present tense, and a variation of the objective point of view.

As O’Farrell imagines it, Hamnet and Judith come down with bubonic plague. Their mother, a healer who is almost preternaturally intuitive, lives with her in-laws while her husband works in London. She saves Judith but cannot save her son, who has, unbeknownst to her, tricked death into taking him in place of his twin.

Her husband returns to help Agnes bury their child but then leaves for London. Barely able to care for herself, let alone her two surviving daughters, she resents her husband. She believes he is unaffected by the death of his son and is too involved with his work. At one point, he tries to tell her that he is overcome with grief, but Agnes, caught up in her own sorrow, cannot relate and looks for evidence that Hamnet is somehow present, possibly as a ghost.

the places he’s lived, and the names of his family members. All of which brings to mind Juliet’s question: “What’s in a name?”

That question runs silently through this multilayered novel, as does another question from Hamlet’s famous soliloquy: “To be or not to be?” It is evoked in Shakespeare’s (as O’Farrell portrays it) suicidal impulse when he holds his dead son.

Both questions suggest another: Did Shakespeare name one of his greatest tragedies after his son? Was the name “Hamlet” just a coincidence, possibly a misspelling of “Amleth,” the hero of a Scandinavian legend? Or was it, as O’Farrell implies, his attempt to restore Hamnet to life?

O’Farrell offers readers a penetrating look into the creative process itself, while her writing subtly becomes a metaphor for that process—which is the beauty of this novel and certainly no mean feat.

NR

Max the Hamster

DAVID MAMET

IF I may, without being indelicate: My wife asked me to scratch her back.

I had difficulty in following her directions to the aggrieved spot, and suggested we use United States geography as a referent.

We know from S. I. Hayakawa (*Language in Thought and Action*, 1949) that the map is not the territory, but the configuration of the Lower 48 is a pretty good match for the human back. We have Washington State over the left shoulder, Maine over the right, the backbone standing in for the Mississippi, and so on.

was tempted by this pleasure, as teachers have been forever, into elaborating the lesson beyond any immediate usefulness.

It is clear from the map, I said, that the country grew and prospered around the networks of transportation and the sites of commerce. Ships brought trade to and from the East Coast, the Gulf Coast, and San Francisco, and the cities prospered as depots for the products sent from and to the interior.

Canoes, then boats, then steamers worked the Great Lakes, to Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago; the Erie Canal and the Sault Ste. Marie, and, in 1959, the Saint Lawrence Seaway opened the Great Lakes to world-wide trade.

Chicago was connected by canal to the Mississippi, to New Orleans, and so to South America and the Caribbean, in 1848. The Mississippi, the Missouri, and the eastern rivers increased the

both geography and custom: blacks separate from whites, gays from straights, Jews from non-Jews.

After World War II, air travel solidified the position of the cities as the creators and arbiters of cultural life; as did television, for that which was deemed News (that is, newsworthy, that is, capable of selling advertising) was chosen in New York by cosmopolitans; as were the books and periodicals deemed worthy of print, and each newly essential height of skirts.

With the development of the jetliner (Boeing 707, first in service in 1958) and cheap air travel, the cities also became destinations—regular Joes and Joans showing up to see the shows and have a couple of drinks.

The railroads, as passenger carriers, died, killed by the airlines. New York, one of the world's great seaports since the 17th-century Dutch ruled it, ceased that operation, in the 20th century, as

The Great Cities attracted talent, whether as Culture (supported by philanthropy) or Bohemia (supported by youth and disposable income).

The plan was marred in execution by my wife's complete ignorance of American geography. She was raised in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Her bafflement at the layout here is as charming as everything else she does.

She was singing a gig, on July Fourth some years back, and included her newly learned "Roll On Columbia, Roll On," by Woody Guthrie. The verse, as sung by her:

Tom Jefferson's vision would not let
him rest.
An Empire he saw in the Pacific
Northeast.

Further affiant sayeth not.

To return to the problem of counter-irritation: We repaired to the blackboard, which is the front of our refrigerator, and I sketched out a map of the U.S., while she, enthralled, looked on. Delighted with both my handiwork and my skill as instructor, I

country's prosperity and the wealth and power of the seaports.

The railroads supplanted waterborne traffic in the 19th century, forming the Eastern Megalopolis and creating the wealth of Chicago, the rail hub. The Great Cities attracted talent, whether as Culture (supported by philanthropy) or Bohemia (supported by youth and disposable income), and developed through the influx of previously close-held regional achievement—see, particularly, African-American music, which came up the Mississippi to Chicago and evolved from work chanties and laments into blues, jazz, and rock and roll, now the music of the world. See also the creation, by several Jewish huckster immigrants, of the motion-picture business in New York.

The cities were, throughout the 20th century, centers of world commerce and, so, of both the fashion and the arts springing from disposable income and its quest for novelty and status; and, as important, from the cross-pollination of various groups previously divided by

the riverfront land became more valuable as residential real estate than as warehouses, transoceanic air travel replaced the passenger liners, and the piers became amusement parks.

I paused in my lecture (you may recall I was explaining this all to my wife), and sat, at the kitchen counter, chalk still in hand.

"What is it?" my wife asked.

And I told her the story of Max the Hamster.

He had been my pet for a few months in the '50s.

It was my job to change his water and to add to his food every day. I did so. But I noted that he was not eating his food.

I kept adding to the supply, as per my instructions, until I realized, one day, that he was dead.

Some parent upbraided me for not remarking, if not the animal's inactivity, the increasing amount of food in the cage. I quipped that, yes, I had erred, but, after removing the hamster, we'd

Mr. Mamet is a writer.

have more room in the cage for each day's new food.

This led me to share with my wife my aperçu about talk radio.

I love AM talk radio. After a lifetime of listening to that sad FM voice selling disappointed and enraged concern, and wistful outrage, I'm just that happy to hear good American speech and advertisements for snake oil.

One of my favorite AM commentators is immensely and deservedly successful. Advertising on his show is consequently at a premium. But here he is in the position of a cabdriver in the rain. Everyone then wants a cab, but the driver can pick up only one fare at a time, and so he may legitimately be maddened by the waste.

As were, it seems, the producers of this talk show.

For, as with the less productive shows, a certain amount of time was set aside each hour for ads.

I don't know what this may be, by FCC statutes, but I assume whatever the upper allowed limit, it is being fudged, as it would otherwise be wasteful. And un-American. All right, then, at some point we return, from X minutes of panaceas, Magic Pillows, or dog treats, and so on, to the actual program.

Now, however, the host will introduce a topic similar to that with which he left us before the commercial break.

He may say, for example, that we live in an increasingly insecure world, and the Federal Reserve says this or that. Then we may perceive that this is neither news nor commentary, but the lead-in to an ad for silver, or gold, or wealth-management services.

We eventually return to some content, but the host, again, employs the discussion topic as a springboard for flogging his newest books, podcasts, and so on.

Like the cabdriver, his time has just become too valuable to squander on its now outdated purpose.

As had the land in the Great Cities.

Rents on Madison Avenue, our Rue de Rivoli, have become too pricey even for the luxury-tourist trade. East Side apartments, which sold for 250 grand in 1970, are now \$20 million; but the cost of the shoes in the shops, though they might rise from \$200 to \$2,000, could not rise to 20 grand; and

stand-alone shops could not stand the rent, leaving the street to vacancies interspersed with flagship stores, which existed only as ads.

The cities tried to control this—call it good or bad, it is inevitable—progression away from popular commerce through the Potemkin villages of rent control, which only meant that taxpayers were subsidizing those lucky enough to find or canny enough to bribe their way into a cushy spot and spend the money they were awarded somewhere else. Rent control, as Milton Friedman observed long ago, leads only to housing shortages. Manhattan Island is the prime example of a city whose success led to the banishment of its middle class, and to its inevitable future as an amusement park and/or a slum.

There is no way to reverse the trend of commerce, which is to say self-interest. We must all follow our fortune, and the most committed and liberal member of the California teachers' union will, on the day of retirement, most likely take the pension to a low-tax red state.

The commerce and wealth of the cities grew with their eminence as aviation hubs, but more air traffic meant bigger airports, farther from city centers, and longer and more arduous commutes. Car travel allowed movement to the suburbs, which meant more cars on the road and unproductive hours (in Los Angeles and San Francisco) on a daily commute.

Los Angeles has the greatest concentration of theatrical talent in the world, but our theaters are mausoleums. Why? After a day in traffic, no one wants to get into the car for another two hours. *Finita la commedia.*

All organisms evolve, thrive, and die. The great cities, long Democratic strongholds, have approached the problems by taxing away the productive, and, in effect, paying folks to stay there—through welfare—or to come there to: "open cities."

But this, we see, avails as little as feeding an absent and dead pet.

The hamster here is commerce. The pandemic, the shutdown, and the riots reveal, of the cities, the truth of that ancient bureaucratic adage: Don't ever take a vacation. They might realize they don't need you.

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City Desk

A COVID Workout



RICHARD BROOKHISER

YOU know how it is in gyms. Even when they ask you to wipe down the equipment once you are done with it, there is always the odd person who leaves the job to the next exerciser. Even on a clean bench with a spotless bar, the bench-presser exhales clouds of grunt with every up-push. Sitting in a row of puffing stationary bicyclists is as healthy as breathing the car exhaust of a rush-hour traffic jam. The shower stalls, even when the handles work and the soap dispenser has been filled some time this year, collect swirls of hair in the drain grids that are best not inquired into. Probably the only activities affording more unwanted contact with your fellow man are Greco-Roman wrestling and prostitution. No wonder gyms rank way down on the list of businesses allowed to reopen when/if our antivirus locks loosen.

Friends ask if I don't do a lot of hiking up in the country. I don't. Hiking is a vacation activity, and I am upstate under compulsion. When would I do it? There is nothing so time-consuming as idleness. Where would I go, even for an ordinary walk? The country is the land of the automobile. Henry Ford made the Model T for farmers. It's three miles from my house for gas or a newspaper, 20 miles for a decent cup of coffee. My friend up here of longest standing lives on top of a mountain. Since spring we have been doing a lot of gardening, but that is the work that yields almost no workout dividend. You kneel, dig, pick, and go back and forth to the house to fetch the clipper

you forgot. Gardening calms and refreshes, and the results can be magical, but it does not build muscle.

I have some weights upstate, and there are edges on which I can do push-ups and dips. But all my real workouts have been done in the city, which now forbids working out. My trainer, a resourceful man, has devised an alternative.

I met him on our last trip to town on the far West Side. The riverfront is unrecognizable from what it was when I first moved here. Then it was a wilderness of maritime decay and desperate sun-worshippers contending with rubble. Now it has been manicured with promenades and mini-parks. My trainer has clients scattered across two boroughs. How he sets up elsewhere I do not know. Here he staked out a tree, for shade in case the sun was shining (happily it wasn't). He looped stretch bands around the legs of park benches, and over a lower branch. So we went to work.

The river at this point (more properly a fjord, a riverbed drowned by the sea) is vast and sullen. A man glided by on a

friendship, as well as of workouts. I have learned more about his home islands than I ever imagined I would know. Blue holes (limestone sinkholes with underwater connections to the ocean). The baton of honor (what police cadets, such as he, contended for). Gaulins (in Jamaica they are white egrets; where he comes from they are large raucous crows). Conchy Joes (the dialect term for indigenous white people). Junkanoo (the local version of carnival, when everyone dresses up and parades with his or her neighborhood crew; my trainer's was the Saxons, which might surprise George Plimpton or Harold II, but history has many cunning passages).

I learned more about professional bodybuilding than I ever imagined I would know. The expense (for drugs) was crushing, the rewards, except for a handful of the most successful, were meager or nonexistent, the judging was subjective and therefore capricious. I watched through his eyes the gallant comeback effort of one of his favorites, a gym mate, who, what with aging and loss of time via occasional legal troubles, never quite

My trainer is one of my
links to humanity. Pre-COVID
I saw him three times a week.

stand-up paddle board. My trainer says he sees him often. I wouldn't do that on a bet, there is current out there. Landlubbers biked and jogged past, almost all of them masked. We were hammered so hard so early we have learned our lesson. Both my trainer and I were masked as well; our salutation was an elbow bump.

My trainer is my last tenuous link to popular culture. I know about Amy Winehouse because he liked her. His soundtrack today was Jamaican reggae. So that is still going on. There was a period some years ago when it went electronic and became as interesting as a knocking car engine. Now it seems to have moved back towards human beings.

My trainer is also one of my links to humanity. Pre-COVID I saw him three times a week. I stopped living at home in 1973, attending classes in 1977, going to the office Monday through Friday in 1987. The only person I saw more often than my trainer in the last two decades was my wife. Time is the indispensable basis of

came back, but never lost his good spirits ("humble" and "old-school" are my friend's two warmest words of praise). I watched the rise and collapse of another gym mate, not humble, who thought to go all the way on a quick start and natural physique, taking no advice, perhaps because he dismissed it as old-school, and who stalled out in the second rank.

I am pro-cop; so, having been one, is my trainer. But I know from him how black men can get hustled. He left a double-parked car in the street once to duck into a store, fell afoul of a martinet sergeant, and spent a night in jail. The morning after was the most strenuous workout I ever had.

Now he paints. His theme is African diaspora. He copies 19th-century photographs of the American South, modern romantic Maasai, Afro-Cuban cigar ladies, Colombian fruit-sellers, junkanoo comrades. He is showing four of his canvases in an outer-borough gallery.

We will work out again my next trip to town.

NR

Film

Faith of Our Fathers

ROSS DOUTHAT

ONE modest reason to lament the waning of the romantic comedy over the last two decades is that it removes from Hollywood's repertoire a genre that's reliably conservative. Even in its gross-out forms, even when some kind of subversion is intended, the requirements of romance involve two human beings putting aside childish things and embracing an ancient institution for the sake of the propagation of the species. In a culture that since the 1970s (at least) has valorized the expressive individual, the quest for the God Within, the rom-com endured as a partial rebuke to the dominant religion, a reminder that human beings can be called to mutual submission and find happiness therein.

The interesting achievement of the new Seth Rogen comedy, *An American Pickle*, which just debuted on HBO's new streaming service, is to distill some of that same conservative energy in a movie where the only important female character is gone after the first ten minutes, and the only major male characters are both played by, well, Seth Rogen.

The first is Herschel Greenbaum, a Jewish immigrant from the old country—here called “Schlupsk,” a land that looks suspiciously like the Russia of *Fiddler on the Roof* and seems similarly overpopulated with Cossacks—who arrives in America in 1919 with his beloved wife, Sarah (Sarah Snook), determined to make his name and fortune. Soon his wife is pregnant and he's killing rats at a Brooklyn pickle factory, where a determined cadre of rodents sends him backpedaling off a platform and into a vat of brine . . . in which, according to the scientifically rigorous logic of time-travel movies, he finds himself perfectly preserved until the vat is reopened a century later.

Released into the wilds of 2019, Herschel discovers that he has just one living descendant, a Brooklynite tech guy named “Ben,” who lives alone with



Seth Rogen in *An American Pickle*

his seltzer machine (a revelation to his great-grandfather) and his unfinished app, Boop Bop, which rates corporate responsibility for online consumers hoping to shop ethically.

Ben and Herschel are archetypes but not quite stereotypes. The former is very much a Millennial, at once underachieving, irreligious, and beset by ennui. But he has a better excuse for being adrift—his parents' car-crash death, unprocessed and (from Herschel's pious perspective) unmourned—than just youthful entitlement. His great-grandfather is a bearded Yiddish patriarch à la Tevye, except somewhat less likeable and more aggressive: Instead of the wistfulness of “If I Were a Rich Man,” his slogan is closer to “Get Rich or Die Tryin.”

But *get rich* for a purpose: The revived Herschel's aggression is activated only when he finds the Jewish cemetery where his beloved Sarah lies buried disused and decaying, with a billboard for Russian vodka looming belligerently above the graves. This leads to a violent altercation with some construction workers, a falling-out between the Greenbaums, and then Herschel's reinvention as a maker of artisanal pickles, a bearded Internet phenomenon, and eventually—thanks to his habit of saying the kinds of things a pious Jew from 1919 might say about our society—a polarizing participant in the American culture wars.

What's striking about this arc, though, is that, while it doesn't stint on showing Herschel's less-than-congenial attributes, wherever his values conflict with his great-grandson's, *An American Pickle* is consistent in suggesting that the old ways are better than the new. Judaism practiced

is better than Jewishness attenuated. The Kaddish is better than solitary grief. Ambition and purpose are better than sustainable decadence. Strife and suffering are a refiner's fire; the pieties of a soft prosperity are callow, empty, thin. The two men, we're repeatedly told, are the same age. But the great-grandfather seems like a father; his similar-aged great-grandfather is played like a boy.

It's not that the movie endorses Herschel's casual references to “sodomites” or the anti-Christian venom that eventually plays a crucial role in his changing fortunes. But it plays that bigotry for laughs in a most unwoke way, while seeming deadly serious about the perils of contemporary anomie. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” might be its motto: The problems of the past were dreadful in their day, but to correct their own era's ills, the comfortable man-children of greater Brooklyn should learn from the past rather than condemn it.

The movie pulls off this maneuver with a certain evasion, it must be said: The Holocaust doesn't feature in the story, despite looming darkly in the century separating the Greenbaums, and neither do the contemporary debates about the state of Israel and American Jewish identity—into which Rogen himself wandered, to backlash and counter-backlash, just before *An American Pickle* came out. The hardest questions, the deepest conflicts between past and present, identity and universalism, aren't resolved or even addressed in its 90-minute running time.

But then it is a comedy, after all—light and modest and often silly, but still as effective a tract for traditionalism as you'll see on any screen this month.

NR

Confessions of a Culture Squish

MAYBE we're just getting to the part of the calendar where the election subsumes all of our other collective miseries, but I have to say I've grown optimistic in the last few weeks that we've turned a corner on the cancel-culture stuff.

Identity-based arguments and assertions of victimhood will continue to be very powerful levers in very powerful institutions, and people will continue to lose their reputations and their livelihoods for holding views that were commonplace 15 years or 15 minutes ago. But the orgiastic, mob-driven phase, the great cleansing, seems to be abating, as a small but influential number of intellectuals, institutions, and even corporations (hello, Trader Joe's!) have pushed back.

This is good because I'm very worried about norms around free speech—or around what counts as *reputable* speech, which as Tyler Cowen and others have pointed out is where the real action is. I think that if it isn't the most immediately pressing issue of the day, it is certainly the one that will most shape the future of the country.

But my worry does not come from a position of certainty that I know the truth and that it needs defending from Jacobin novelties. It comes from a position of *doubt*. Broad and deep and all-penetrating doubt about the very most important things.

Doubt is the organizing principle of my worldview. The number of things I know for certain to be true is vanishingly small. Like the priest in *Rudy*, I know that there is a God, and that I'm not Him. Almost every other view I hold, I hold weakly.

Which is not the same as saying I change my mind a lot, or easily. I flatter myself that I've reasoned my way into my positions, and that I hold them because I think there's more evidence that they are true than the contrary. But one can tenaciously defend a position one believes in 51 to 49, and I think I'd probably shock my colleagues by listing some of the things I'll avow by similarly narrow scores.

And on the most explosive subjects of our age—identity politics, especially as they relate to race and gender—my doubt is plenipotentiary. I've been writing about conservative topics for a dozen years or so now. In all that time I can count on one hand, certainly on two, the number of times I've pushed these hottest of buttons.

The wisdom of this abstention is borne out every time I encounter one of the few things I have committed to paper on these subjects. Inevitably I see something I would have put differently or not said at all. A blind spot or an unexamined prejudice. Jokes that bring wincing, rectitude that makes me squirm.

Is there a certain cowardice in all this? Am I scared of the wrathful exuberance of the people who police these topics from the left? Maybe. I've changed my views on trade with China and criminal justice, after all, but I don't necessarily cringe when I see what I wrote about those topics in 2011.

But I think it's also that identity is just *different*. When people argue that identity politics is illiberal, they have in mind that our Lockean inheritance is premised on the *irrelevance* of personal identity to our status as individuals with rights and equal claims to autonomy. And that's true. But it's also the very thing that gives identity-based claims of oppression their force. If we weren't so thoroughly committed to what John Rawls called the "veil of ignorance"—the idea that our

regime should abstract us from the accidents of our birth and circumstances—then a politics built on claims of oppression on the basis of identity would have no power.

And since we cannot in *fact* govern from behind the veil of ignorance—since we can never treat others as featureless political subjects, but must always encounter them as actual souls—we are obliged, I think, to govern with as much empathy as we can muster on any given day. Empathy is after all an emotion rooted in doubt and uncertainty. It is, "There but for the grace of God . . ."

So when I wrestle with questions of identity I try to draw on my stock of empathy. I think of my personal and professional relationships with people of color, whose self-conceptions are not monolithic, but as starkly varied as Clarence Thomas's and Kamala Harris's. On issues of sex and gender identity, I think about the gay friends—some of them conservatives, incidentally—who

trusted me enough to "come out" to me as far back as the '90s, when doing so was by no means free of social risk. I certainly think about my wife, who has dealt directly with both racism and misogyny. And more recently of the first "nonbinary" person I came to know, and how those conversations changed my perceptions.

None of this means I don't have views about the claims that haunt the more avant-garde corners of Twitter, or that the views I have are the same as the average diversity-and-inclusion coordinator's. But it means I'm acutely aware that I could be wrong and, for that matter, the diversity coordinator could be wrong, too, and it wouldn't make them evil.

Plenty has already been written about the more than faint Maoism of the cancelers. All true enough. But it's also true that building a free and fearless discourse isn't just about protecting the way of righteous moral minorities who will one day be vindicated by history. No, to defend free exchange is already, intrinsically to defend the right to be *wrong*. It is about the freedom to persuade—and to be persuaded. **NR**

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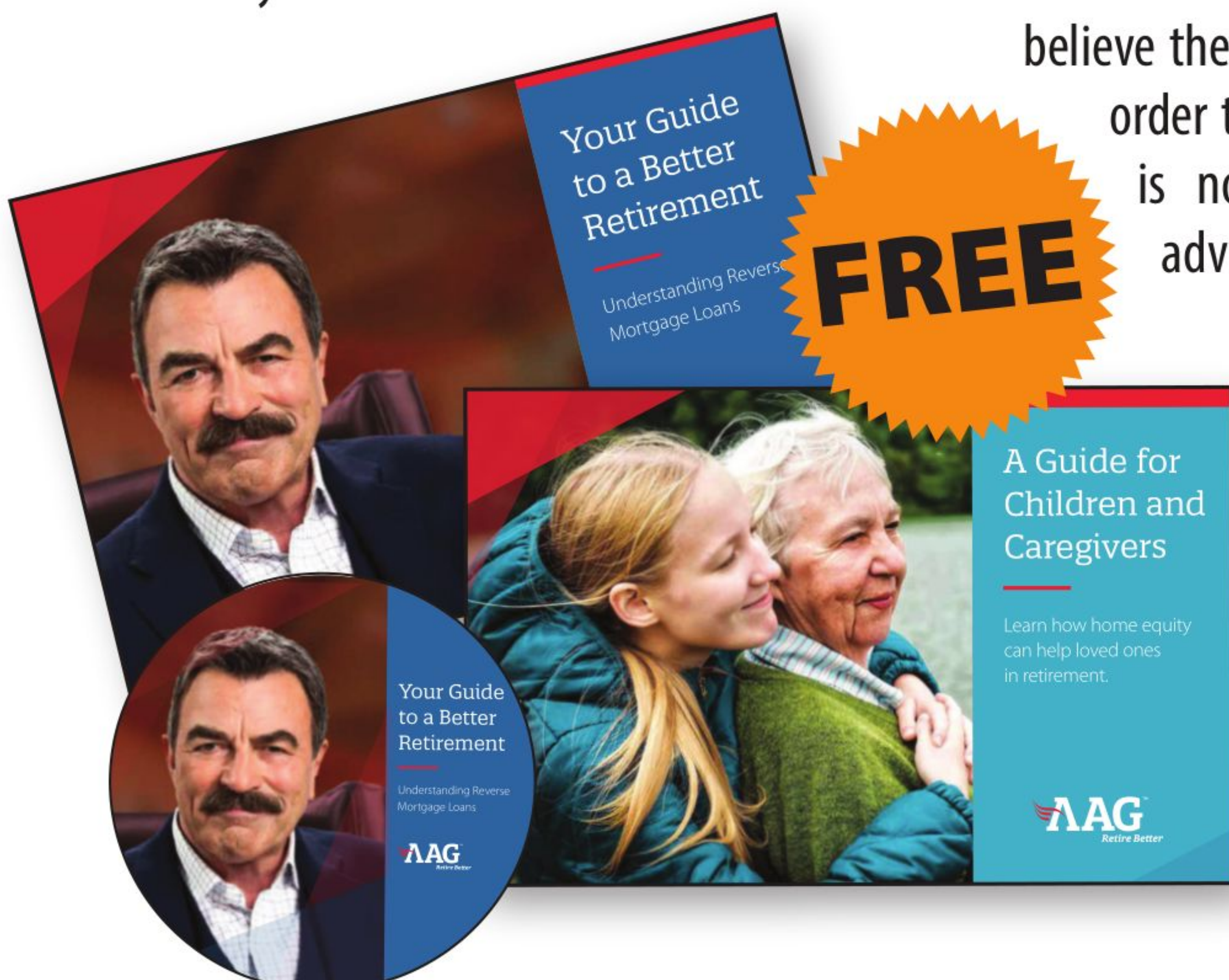
For example, a lot of people mistakenly believe the home must be paid off in full in order to qualify for a HECM loan, which is not the case. In fact, one key advantage of a HECM is that the proceeds will first be used to

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